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HIGHER GROUND

Cooperation key to speed up tech breakthroughs

Experts, officials point to risks posed to world economy by potential decoupling

By MA SI
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Greater international cooperation is needed to explore technological frontiers such as computer-brain interface technologies and artificial intelligence, which are widely seen as key future drivers of global economic growth, officials and experts said.

Highlighting that decoupling in crucial technologies will only slow down the world economy, they called on Chinese companies to have a problem-solving mindset and to accelerate the drive for breakthroughs in core sectors.

The comments came as AI is grabbing global headlines.

US company Nvidia became the world's first chipmaker with a market capitalization of over $1 trillion on Tuesday morning amid surging demand for its AI chips. Meanwhile, Tesla CEO Elon Musk's brain-implant company Neuralink said last week that it had been given the green light for its first in-human clinical trial.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Thursday that China firmly opposes any actions by the United States to politicize and weaponize economic, trade and technological issues.

These comments were in response to recent media reports quoting US Treasury official Paul Rosen as saying that new rules were under consideration which would restrict the flow of US investment and know-how to Chinese companies engaged in the fields of advanced semiconductors, AI and quantum computing.

But China is clear that partnership and cooperation is the only way forward if the world is to fully harness the potential offered by the technological revolution, according to experts.

This was expressed clearly by President Xi Jinping in his congratulatory message to the 2023 Zhongguancun Forum, which ended in Beijing earlier this week. Xi said in the message that China is willing to work with countries around the world to promote technological innovation to better benefit the people of all countries.

Wu Hequan, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said international cooperation is vital to achieving scientific breakthroughs, and China and the US are highly complementary to each other in AI.

US companies are advanced in fundamental science and underlying computer algorithms, while China has a big market and rich application scenarios, and its research and development prowess in AI is also growing, Wu said.

By 2022, China had secured the top position globally in terms of the number of patent applications for AI, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

AI technology will usher in the next digital revolution after the internet and smartphones, experts said, with Goldman Sachs forecasting that generative AI could drive a 7 percent increase in global GDP, or almost $7 trillion, over a 10-year period.

Nick Fowler, chief academic officer at Elsevier, a Netherlands-based academic publishing company, said there is enduring strength in the China-US research relationship, despite noise about the two countries decoupling.

The Field Weighted Citation Impact — a proxy measure of research quality — of China-US co-authored publications reached almost two, which is twice the world average, and higher than the performance of either China or the US alone, according to a report by Elsevier.

While Washington is imposing increasingly tighter restrictions on technology, China's central leadership is attaching greater importance to innovation-driven development.

Beijing and Shenzhen, a metropolis in Guangdong province, announced favorable policies this week to support the development of domestically developed AI chips, which are the key to the ongoing AI boom triggered by ChatGPT, an AI chatbot developed by the US company OpenAI.

Liu Qingfeng, chairman of Chinese AI company iFlytek Co, said, "Chinese companies must devote big, real money to research and development in fundamental science to achieve breakthroughs in AI."

So far, China has developed at least 79 AI large-language models, or rivals of ChatGPT, according to the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China.

When it comes to computer-brain interface technology, which enables a person to control an external device using brain signals, China is also making steady progress.

A team led by Duan Feng, a professor at Nankai University in Tianjin, completed the world's first interventional brain-computer interface experiment in a nonhuman primate earlier this month.

Green project

China's first offshore million-ton carbon storage project is put into operation on Thursday in the South China Sea. The project, serving the Enping 15-1 oil platform 200 kilometers southwest of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, is designed to capture and store more than 1.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to planting nearly 14 million trees, according to the China National Offshore Oil Corporation. MAO SIQIAN / XINHUA **See story, page 3**

Smart town changing face of elderly care

By CANG WEI in Nanjing
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China is tackling the challenge of caring for its aging population by learning from Japan's experiences, establishing the first Sino-Japanese "elderly friendly" community in Yixing, Jiangsu province.

A total of 794 apartments and 376 villas have been built in the city to serve the elderly. The project, jointly developed by Yada Senior Living Group, a Beijing-based company, and Japanese company Panasonic, covers 4 square kilometers and is Panasonic's first "Healthy Smart Town" project in China.

Han Kui, president of Yada, said that with its unique facilities and services, the community has been warmly welcomed by Chinese people.

Cutting-edge technologies have been installed in the community, according to Han. For instance, high-tech toilets can collect urine samples and detect a person's body fat and heart rates, and connect that information to a smartphone for analysis.

A smart sleep system automatically adjusts lighting and air conditioning to create a better sleeping environment.

"Our goal at the very beginning of establishing the community was to extend life expectancy in a healthy way by 10 years," Han said. "Apart from government-funded institutions, private institutions should also play a key role in addressing the aging population.

"China's elderly care services system has not developed as early as some other countries. But the process of its aging (population) has developed rapidly due to the structure of its population, thus placing enormous pressure on such a populous country," he said.

Wang Jue, dean of Southeast University's School of Humanities in Nanjing, said that while many countries around the world are facing the problem of an aging population, China has its own characteristics. These include the largest elderly population in the world, the rapid growth of the aging population and huge regional differences, she said.

According to the National Health Commission, by 2035 the population age 60 and above will exceed 400 million, accounting for over 30 percent of China's total population.

At the end of 2021, the population of people age 60 and above in China stood at 267 million, accounting for 18.9 percent of the total population. The population of those age 65 and above surpassed 200 million, accounting for 14.2 percent of the total, it said.

As of 2020, a total of 10 provincial-level regions, including the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning and Sichuan, had 20 percent of their population age 60 and above, according to the commission.

"Japan belongs to the East Asian cultural circle and faced the aging challenge earlier than China. It has a relatively complete social security system and supportive policies for the elderly," said Wang from Southeast University.

"We should learn from the experiences of Japan, which encourages private companies and social institutions to participate in caring for the elderly. We should also learn from Japan and establish social security systems in elderly care, medical care and nursing for the elderly."

She added that China should introduce policies to support elderly employment and housing, and set standards for the elderly care service industry.

Guo Jun contributed to this story.

BUSINESSES BENEFIT FROM SERIES OF TAX, FEE CUTS

Policies help firms weather the effects of COVID-19

By ZHANG YUE
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With businesses in China rebounding from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of this year, the nation's economic growth has accelerated.

indepth

Business owners — from manufacturing to services — are resuming production, and economic activities are up and running again, with the economy growing by 4.5 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, exceeding expectations.

A series of factors helped businesses survive three years of challenging times. For most companies, fiscal policy aid has been urgently needed and consistently applied.

During this time, many enterprises — large and small — have been able to apply for tax relief and liquidity support under various preferential policies. They have used these funds to keep their payrolls stable, retain workers and resume production.

See ***Taxation****, page 2*

US House approves debt-ceiling bill to avoid disastrous default

Kevin McCarthy, speaker of the United States House of Representatives, gives a speech on Wednesday following the House vote on the Fiscal Responsibility Act at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. MANDEL NGAN / AFP

By AI HEPING in New York
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The Republican-controlled United States House of Representatives approved a bipartisan bill on Wednesday with help from Democrats to suspend the US debt ceiling for two years and limit federal spending to avoid a disastrous, and unprecedented default.

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The final vote was 314-117, with 165 Democrats and 149 Republicans voting for it. Opposing the bill were 71 Republicans and 46 Democrats.

Republicans control the House 222-213, and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy needed 218 votes to push the deal through.

The deal, agreed to by President Joe Biden and McCarthy, now goes to the Democrat-led Senate for its expected approval and then to Biden for his signature. It faces a Monday deadline to become law to avert default.

In a statement, Biden said that he thanked "Speaker McCarthy and his team for negotiating in good faith".

In a social media post, McCarthy said, "The House just passed the biggest spending cut in American history."

The deal suspends the borrowing limit of $31.4 trillion until January 2025. The deal, which would lift the debt ceiling by $1.5 trillion in exchange for saving $4.3 trillion by capping spending for two years, essentially gives the Treasury Department the latitude to borrow as much money as it needs to pay the nation's bills during that time.

The centerpiece of the agreement remains a two-year suspension of the debt ceiling, which caps the total amount of money the government is allowed to borrow. Suspending that cap would allow the government to keep borrowing money and pay its bills on time.

Before the House voted on the bill, Democrats helped push through a procedural rule on Wednesday afternoon to allow the bill to be debated. The rule was approved 241-187, with 52 Democrats in support and 29 Republicans opposed.

"House Democrats are going to make sure the country doesn't default. Period. Full stop," House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries told reporters earlier on Wednesday.

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VISIT…

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Taxation: Crucial support measures welcomed

From page 1

SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Zhuo Changli, 59, head of an agency in Jinan, Shandong province that specializes in domestic services and cares for the elderly and children, said tax and fee relief has been a crucial policy support measure for the business since 2020.

In 2019, just two months before COVID-19 emerged, the Ministry of Finance issued a circular announcing increased value-added tax, or VAT, deductions for community services such as housekeeping, child care, and care for the elderly.

This meant that Zhuo's agency could save costs and that its financial pressure was greatly relieved.

"Looking back, the policy was a near-lifesaver for our company and the entire domestic services industry," Zhuo said.

For the past three years, Zhuo's agency has used funds gained from a series of tax cuts to sustain its operations and keep its payroll stable, particularly during the pandemic.

Moreover, tax cuts introduced from 2020 to last year to assist small businesses helped keep the agency operational. Last year, it enjoyed a tax cut of about 3.06 million yuan ($439,722), equivalent to 25 percent of its profit for the year.

Li Yucheng, director of the government fund settlement center in Jinan, said: "Local fiscal and taxation departments have worked in synergy and innovated preferential tax policy implementation. They've also launched a raft of measures to facilitate tax payment to ensure that such tax and fee breaks can benefit businesses directly."

In January, figures released by the Ministry of Finance showed that tax and fee cuts, tax refunds and deferred payments last year totaled 4.2 trillion yuan, including 2.4 trillion yuan in VAT tax rebates — the largest amount in recent years.

Since mid-2020, when COVID-19 started to affect businesses, particularly small and micro ventures, China has issued a range of fiscal policy support measures to ease their cost burdens.

Tax and fee reductions introduced from 2020 to last year totaled about 7.8 trillion yuan.

The reductions included postponed tax payments for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Tax cuts for self-employed businesses totaled 1.02 trillion yuan.

Last year, a refined VAT measure was introduced nationwide, offering support mainly for manufacturing businesses experiencing supply and production chain disruption, rising costs for bulk commodities, and problems due to surging cases of COVID-19.

Effective method

Local authorities and business owners are now benefiting from such policies.

Yuan Peiquan, deputy head of the Shandong Provincial Department of Finance, said: "Tax and fee reductions have proved a direct and effective way of helping enterprises ease their financial burdens. They've helped nurture businesses and have cultivated sources of tax revenue."

Last year, Shandong realized 297.6 billion yuan in deferred tax and fee cuts. Local VAT credit rebates totaled 172.2 billion yuan.

Tax breaks, especially VAT credit rebates, help manufacturing businesses ease their liquidity burdens more directly, as they are eligible to retain rebated tax credits and use them to resume production.

Over the past three years, authorities below national level have helped such businesses streamline their tax reduction and rebate procedures so that they can obtain liquidity as soon as possible.

Song Yulong, head of the finance department at Shandong Xin Shidai Pharmaceutical Co, said the business enjoyed 221 million yuan in tax and fee cuts last year, including about 6.75 million yuan in VAT credit rebates.

"As a manufacturing and research-centered company, last year was particularly hard for us, as the pandemic kept disrupting production. Such a large amount of liquidity not only helped us surmount these challenges, but also enabled us to expand our investment in scientific research," Song said.

Some areas have tried every way possible to ensure that funds received as a result of tax cuts and tax credit rebates reach businesses as quickly as possible.

Sun Shufeng, Party secretary of the taxation administration in Zouping, Shandong, said that last year, the administration worked to streamline the online system to help business owners apply for tax rebates.

In February, a survey by the administration showed that 97.6 percent of business owners said the tax cuts and rebate policies were conducive to their companies' growth. The majority of these ventures are manufacturing businesses.

China's tax breaks this year are slightly different compared with those in recent years.

Wang Daoshu, deputy commissioner of the State Taxation Administration, said on April 5 that businesses are likely to receive tax and fee cuts totaling more than 1.8 trillion yuan this year, down from 4.2 trillion yuan last year.

In March, this year's Government Work Report stressed that efforts are needed to improve preferential tax and fee policies, and "extend and further refine policies on tax and fee cuts, tax rebates, and tax deferrals as the situation requires" — a term slightly different from the large-scale tax and fee cuts promoted in recent years.

Shi Yinghua, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences, said fiscal sustainability and businesses' recovery are two major reasons for the change.

"Large-scale tax and fee cuts were mostly needed when the economy faced acute downward pressure and businesses were having a particularly hard time because of COVID-19. During such times, the policy effect of tax breaks was clearly apparent, as they kept growth stable and sustained jobs," she said.

"Yet with such large-scale tax breaks, fiscal spending is also amplified. It will be challenging to maintain such a brisk pace for tax cuts in the long run, as fiscal sustainability is a key factor to consider. This year, with the optimization of COVID-19 containment, businesses are recovering gradually and their revenues are picking up. Preferential tax cuts will likely benefit businesses and financial sustainability."

Fiscal sustainability is a key factor to watch after three years of sizable tax and fee cuts, especially as COVID-19-related fiscal spending has risen significantly.

Finance Minister Liu Kun said in a statement on the ministry's website that great uncertainty still shrouds fiscal revenue, and there is still an acute imbalance between such revenue and spending.

Events in the first quarter indicate that businesses may still face mixed fortunes this year, as the recovery process can be bumpy.

Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show the nation's manufacturing sector expanded for the third consecutive month in March. The official purchasing managers index, or PMI, for manufacturing stood at 51.9 for that month — above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

Yet manufacturing unexpectedly shrank afterward, with official manufacturing PMI falling to 49.2 in April and to 48.8 in May, back in contraction territory, NBS figures show. Profits at industrial firms also slumped in the first four months of 2023 according to NBS data, as businesses continue to face margin pressures and moderate demand.

Zhao Qinghe, a senior statistician at the bureau, said, "Enterprises still face problems such as insufficient market demand, tight cash flow and high operating costs," — an indication that the situation remains challenging.

Robin Xing, chief China economist at Morgan Stanley, believes that this year, fiscal expenditure growth could still strengthen due to a cyclical recovery in revenue. The changing scale of tax cuts indicates that overall macroeconomic policies are likely to become more targeted toward those who need the incentives most.

"Since the start of this year, China has seen a phasing out of tax cuts, particularly in scale. Macroeconomic policies have become more recuperative, facilitating the opening up of the economy," he said.

Such a process can be long and challenging, he added, so a pragmatic approach is needed to recovery, and incentives aimed at businesses should be stable and sustainable.

Shi said that this year, tax cuts will be targeted and tailor-made. They will lean toward vulnerable smaller business communities that experienced more hardship than others during the pandemic, as well as technology and innovation businesses, which are part of the country's high-quality development drive.

Such moves are already in the pipeline. On March 24, an executive meeting of the State Council decided that the policy allowing enterprises entitled to an additional pretax deduction of 75 percent for research and development expenses to apply for a 100 percent reduction will continue as part of long-term institutional arrangements.

Zhu Zhongming, vice-minister of finance, said, "Turning the previous preferential policy into an institutional arrangement without setting a deadline will boost tech-centered companies' confidence in investing in research, and better anchor expectations of innovation-based firms.

"It means that from this year on, businesses can be freed from the constant concern that the pretax deduction policy may end. This will help them plan for greater investment in innovation at the earliest possible date, and embrace China's high-quality growth with research outcomes."

Beijing tipped to remain preferred destination for foreign capital

By XINHUA

Experts have tipped Beijing to continue being an appealing destination for foreign investment by actively attracting sci-tech innovation projects and talent, while steadfastly striving to enhance its business environment.

Executives from foreign-funded companies, investors and government officials gave the Chinese capital — a leading hub for scientific and technological innovation — this vote of confidence at the 2023 Invest Beijing Global Summit.

The summit was held on the sidelines of the 2023 Zhongguancun Forum, held from May 25 to 30 in the city's Zhongguancun innovation hub, known as "China's Silicon Valley."

During the summit, domestic and foreign companies signed a series of investment deals worth more than 60.8 billion yuan (about $8.61 billion), covering 39 projects in Beijing's high-tech sectors such as intelligent connected vehicles, medicine and health, and intelligent manufacturing.

A total of 152 investment projects involving enterprise financing, park cooperation, building cooperation, and land financing were also announced during the summit, with a total investment of 143.4 billion yuan.

Hubertus Troska, member of the board of management at Mercedes-Benz Group responsible for Greater China, said Beijing has the largest number of regional headquarters of Fortune 500 enterprises and gives priority to development in fields such as services trade, technological innovation, and intelligent manufacturing.

In the past 10 years, Mercedes-Benz Group and its local partners have invested more than 100 billion yuan in China, focusing on expanding local production capacity, strengthening local research and development capability, and building the automotive industry chain, among other key fields.

"I'm confident that Beijing, with its clear commitment to continuing with China's reform and opening-up policy and constantly improving business environment, will remain an attractive choice for foreign investors," said Troska, who has lived in the city for more than a decade.

Carl-Alexander Scheef, vice-president of Bayer Healthcare Co, China, said Beijing's efforts in driving reform and opening-up, along with preferential policies, encouraged Bayer to become one of the first foreign-funded enterprises to settle in the city.

Local government officials have visited the company's factory in Beijing several times to better understand its development needs. The launch of China (Beijing) Pilot Free Trade Zone in September 2020 has also helped Bayer with a resilient supply chain and speedy customs clearances, giving the company more confidence in its future development in Beijing, Scheef said.

Last year, Bayer invested 40 million euros (about $43 million) in setting up four new packaging production lines in China, increasing its capacity by at least 40 percent. "It's a big investment, because we really believe in the growth of the Chinese market," Scheef added.

Sheng Qiuping, vice-minister of commerce, said: "Beijing is one of the first pilot cities in China to carry out the construction of international consumer center cities and the cultivation of an innovative business environment. We sincerely welcome foreign-funded enterprises to carry out investment in Beijing and continuously expand fields of cooperation."

Beijing has become a hot spot for foreign investment in China. The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics said actual utilized foreign direct investment totaled $17.41 billion last year, a year-on-year rise of 12.7 percent. Of this total, $6.98 billion was spent on scientific research and technology services.

The city has also become a prominent hub for sci-tech innovation, as it is home to nearly 100 universities and more than 1,000 research institutes. It holds third position globally in terms of the number of unicorn companies — those valued at $1 billion or more. Beijing has also secured top spot in the Nature Index global science city rankings six consecutive times.

The Zhongguancun innovation hub has attracted more than 300 multinational companies to set up regional headquarters and research centers, and over 130 Fortune Global 500 companies to establish branch offices.

Zhou Kui, partner at investment company Sequoia China, said, "Beijing has long attached great importance to the development ecosystem of the venture capital industry, providing sufficient talent reserves for cutting-edge sci-tech innovation and rich scenarios for technology application."

A total of 50 companies based in Beijing that Sequoia has invested in, 50 have completed initial public offerings, and 43 have become unicorn companies.

"We firmly believe that more achievements and leading enterprises with global influence will be seen in the future in Beijing," Zhou added.

Commercial court grows in standing

Shenzhen venue becomes preferred choice to handle cross-border cases

By CAO YIN in Shenzhen, Guangdong
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A court in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has become the preferred venue for cross-border commercial dispute resolution, as it is better suited to solving such cases through accurate applications of extraterritorial laws and simplified procedures.

"The accurate application of the law means fairness, and the streamlined process means efficiency, both of which are what litigants from home and abroad in commercial disputes most need," said Bian Fei, president of the Shenzhen Qianhai Cooperation Zone People's Court in Guangdong province.

He made the remarks during an exclusive interview with China Daily recently, adding that the court's efforts to ensure fairness and efficiency have boosted its global reputation.

Located in Qianhai, an experimental zone in western Shenzhen that aims to strengthen collaboration between the city and neighboring Hong Kong, the court was set up on Jan 28, 2015, to implement judicial reforms established by the Supreme People's Court, the country's top court.

As a pilot program to contribute to the development of the Greater Bay Area and enhance its international judicial credibility by innovating its external trial system, the Qianhai court aims to tackle first-instance commercial disputes across Shenzhen involving people from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and abroad.

Data showed that from February 2015 to March this year, the court heard 17,254 such cases, covering 128 countries and regions. More than 64.5 percent of the disputes involved Hong Kong litigants.

So far, the court has solved 167 cases by applying extraterritorial laws, including 118 solved by applying Hong Kong laws — ranking first in quantity among courts nationwide, according to the data.

"The ability of ascertaining and applying extraterritorial laws reflects the opening-up level of a court," Bian said, adding that various measures to improve this ability have been taken over the past few years.

For example, the court has built a free platform for judges and litigants to research overseas laws, because only by learning how laws are stipulated can the accurate application be guaranteed, he added.

Wang Hu, a judge from the court, regards law ascertainment and application as a big challenge in tackling cross-border commercial disputes.

"To cope with the challenge, I need to keep learning about extraterritorial laws and get familiar with commercial rules concerning external affairs, because in this way, my capability to hear disputes will be improved, so as to equally protect domestic and overseas litigants," he said.

"Effectively handling cross-border commercial disputes will also help create a sound business environment," he added.

> "The accurate application of the law means fairness, and the streamlined process means efficiency, both of which are what litigants from home and abroad in commercial disputes most need."
>
> **Bian Fei,** president of the Shenzhen Qianhai Cooperation Zone People's Court in Guangdong province

In addition to the efforts made by judges, Bian said that the court has also allowed Hong Kong jurors, who have a better understanding about the special administrative region's laws, to participate in handling cases so that Hong Kong litigants will have more faith in the process.

According to the data, 32 Hong Kong jurors have taken part in the handling of 920 cases, while 2,415 other disputes have been resolved through mediation with the help of 49 mediators invited from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and foreign nations.

Winnie Tam Wan-chi, former chairwoman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, said inviting mediators from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and foreign countries to help settle cross-border commercial disputes is a better way to facilitate the integrated development of legal talent in the Greater Bay Area.

Moreover, litigants from overseas can also enjoy easier access to legal services. For example, case filings, trials and the delivery of legal documents can all be handled online. The court's time for hearing commercial disputes involving external affairs was shortened to 6.4 months in 2022 from 17.5 months in 2015, the data said.

To further promote the integrated development of the Greater Bay Area, Bian said that the court has also stepped up efforts to understand the differences between commercial laws on the mainland and those in Hong Kong.

The laws will be listed online and provided for free to those ready to invest in the area to learn, he said, hoping it can help prevent risks arising.

He added that the court has finished making legal comparisons in eight commercial fields, including private lending and equity transfers, two sectors in which judges see the most frequent disputes.

Ready to cruise

China's first domestically built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, starts its floating-up process in Shanghai on Thursday morning and is expected to be undocked on Tuesday. The ship was jointly designed and built by the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism and CSSC Cruise Technology Development Co. Measuring 323.6 meters in length, the 135,500-metric-ton cruise ship can accommodate up to 5,246 passengers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Good breeding

A staff member prepares to feed alpacas at a breeding base in Xilin Gol League in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Thursday. More than 1,000 Chilean alpacas have recently been brought to the base. The profitable alpaca breeding industry has lifted many local farmers out of poverty. PENG YUAN / XINHUA

FM: China offers opportunities, not risks

By WANG QINGYUN
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China offers opportunities to other nations and doesn't pose any risks to them, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Thursday, urging the world to understand and watch out for the real risks.

Mao's comment came after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Wednesday at a news conference in Sweden that the United States and the European Union are not looking for decoupling with China, but are focused on "de-risking" their relations with China.

Dismissing Blinken's remarks, Mao said that China is firmly committed to advancing high-level opening-up and providing market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment for companies of all countries.

"China pursues trade, sci-tech and investment cooperation with all countries based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. It staunchly upholds international equity and justice, and facilitates the settlement of differences through dialogue and consultation. A country like this is a source of opportunities, not risks," she said during a daily news briefing.

The true risks faced by the world are practices such as stoking bloc confrontation, brewing a new Cold War, wantonly interfering in other countries' internal affairs and causing regional turmoil and chaos, Mao said.

Risks also lie in politicizing trade and sci-tech issues, destabilizing global industrial and supply chains, shifting domestic economic and financial risks overseas and reaping global wealth like a seasonal crop. "The international community needs to be vigilant and needs to jointly fend off these risks," she said.

Instead of "decoupling", Western countries and blocs have turned to the word "de-risking" to explain their approach toward China on a number of occasions, including in the Group of Seven leaders' communique issued last month, triggering China's rebuttal.

Decoupling is unrealistic in today's world, and the world doesn't need so-called de-risking that targets China, the country has said.

During his visit to Germany last month, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang said that Europe "will decouple from opportunities, cooperation, stability and development" if it seeks to decouple from China in the name of "de-risking".

Healthcare drive started for orphans in Africa

By MO JINGXI
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Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping, joined hands with the Organization of African First Ladies for Development to initiate a healthcare campaign for orphans in Africa ahead of International Children's Day, which fell on Thursday.

Under the initiative, representatives from Chinese embassies in African countries and Chinese medical teams sent to African countries will visit local orphanages or allied institutions to facilitate and conduct free physical check-ups. They will also bring the children care packages.

China is an everlasting friend and sincere partner of Africa, Peng said, noting that this year marks the 60th anniversary of China sending its first medical aid team to Africa.

Peng said that Chinese medical aid workers have actively provided assistance to local people in African countries and become "messengers in white" of China-Africa friendship.

She expressed hope that the campaign will bring warmth and care to African children, promote their well-being and contribute to building a China-Africa community with a shared future in the new era.

Monica Geingos, first lady of Namibia and president of the Organization of African First Ladies for Development, and other members of the body highly appreciated Peng's long-term concern and support for the development of welfare projects for African women and children.

The presidents, first ladies and senior officials of African countries who attended local activities of the campaign said they were sincerely grateful to China for its selfless help and valuable support to Africa for decades. They said they expected Africa-China friendship to advance further, so that the two sides could create a better future together.

Since China sent its first medical team to the Algerian city of Saida in 1963, a total of 24,314 medical personnel have treated more than 227 million patients in Africa as of December last year, according to National Health Commission.

Nation's first offshore carbon capture project put into use

By ZHENG XIN
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The operation of China's first offshore carbon capture and storage demonstration project will further facilitate China's carbon peak and neutrality goals, as oil companies step up research and investment to help them become sustainable in the long run, industry experts said.

The demonstration project began operations on Thursday in the eastern waters of the South China Sea. It will help fill the gap in China's offshore carbon capture, treatment, injection and storage technology, said its operator China National Offshore Oil Corporation.

The facility is expected to store 300,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, and is designed to capture and store up to 1.5 million tons of carbon dioxide produced during the process of oilfield development, said Deng Changhong, deputy general manager of the Shenzhen Branch of CNOOC.

Carbon dioxide captured during oilfield development was injected 800 meters under water on Thursday, close to the Enping 15-1 platform, Asia's largest offshore oil production platform, CNOOC said.

The platform, put into operation at the end of last year, has a daily peak crude production capacity of 7,000 tons. However, the amount of carbon dioxide produced during the oilfield development remains high. If the carbon dioxide is treated in a conventional way, it will not only corrode offshore platforms and pipelines, but also increase carbon dioxide emissions, CNOOC said.

Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute, said that technological breakthroughs in carbon capture and storage are among the most effective ways for China to achieve deep cuts in emissions, offering a way to reduce emissions in sectors that are hard to decarbonize.

Oil companies across the globe are already stepping up research and investment in this area. This will not only expand their own businesses but also help them become sustainable in the long run, he said.

Zhu Yi, a senior analyst at Bloomberg Intelligence, a market monitor, said that carbon capture and storage is an essential part of the solution for China to achieve a carbon peak by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060. The country's commitment to peak carbon dioxide emissions will motivate various sectors to upgrade production lines and techniques, Zhu added.

According to a report released by energy company Shell, China, with an estimated 2,400 gigatons in storage capacity, has significant geological potential for storing carbon, second only to the United States.

CNOOC said the company will continue to increase investment in scientific research and promote the green development of offshore oil and gas fields.

Deal: Bill draws criticism from members of both parties

From page 1

On Tuesday, the House Rules Committee narrowly advanced the 99-page legislation for a vote by the House. The GOP-controlled committee voted 7-6 to move the legislation to the House floor, with no Democrats joining Republicans in support.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the bipartisan deal would cut federal spending by $1.5 trillion over a decade by effectively freezing some funding that had been projected to increase next year and then limiting spending to 1 percent growth in 2025, which is considered a spending cut because the increase won't keep pace with inflation.

The legislation would also impose stricter work requirements for food stamps, take back some funding for the Internal Revenue Service enforcement and unspent coronavirus relief money, accelerate the permitting of new energy projects and officially end Biden's student loan repayment freeze.

The deal also essentially ensures construction of the long-delayed Mountain Valley Pipeline, a $6.6 billion project to transport natural gas through Appalachia — a region in the central and southern sections of the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern US.

Staunch conservative Republicans and progressive and liberal Democrats were unhappy with the deal. Hard-line Republicans say there aren't enough cuts; Democrats balked over changes to recipients of food stamps.

The House Freedom Caucus — a congressional caucus consisting of conservative Republican members of the House — said the bill falls well short of the spending cuts they demanded, and they vowed to try to halt its passage.

"This deal fails, fails completely," said Representative Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, chairman of the Freedom Caucus. "We will do everything in our power to stop it."

"Nobody could have done a worse job," said Representative Dan Bishop of North Carolina, who said he was fed up with what he said were McCarthy's "lies" about the deal he was going to get.

The bill would impose some new work requirements for people age 50 to 54 receiving food stamps, as well as those in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Progressive and liberal Democrats decried the new work requirements.

Representative Cori Bush of Missouri, a member of the Progressive Caucus, a leftist faction of the Democratic Party, said she was leaning against the bill.

"As somebody who was a food stamp recipient, there is absolutely no way I can see myself greenlighting something that will take food from people's mouths," she said.

The Congressional Budget Office said the spending restrictions in the package would reduce deficits by $1.5 trillion over the decade, a top goal for the Republicans trying to curb the debt load.

But in a surprise, the office said that the Republican drive to tighten requirements for food stamp eligibility for some adults — but loosening them for others, including veterans and homeless people — would increase federal spending on the program by $2.1 billion. Overall, the budget office estimated the deal would make an additional 78,000 people eligible for food stamps.

Agencies contributed to this story.

CHINA

Marriage made easier

Zhang Kerong (second left) from Sichuan province and Xu Yanan from Heilongjiang province register their marriage at the Saihan District Civil Affairs Bureau in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Thursday. Twenty-one provincial-level regions, including Inner Mongolia, are now allowing mainland residents to register their marriages and divorces across the regions in a pilot program. LIU WENHUA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Sci-tech cluster to promote international exchanges

With a plethora of universities and R&D institutions, Beijing seen as ideal host

By ZHANG ZHIHAO
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The China Association for Science and Technology and the Beijing municipal government have launched the nation's first cluster of headquarters for international science and technology organizations.

The cluster, located in Chaoyang district, is designed to promote international exchanges and cooperation in science and technology.

Experts said the cluster, which currently features eight international organizations, would allow foreign scientists and academic institutions to work more closely with Chinese peers, leading to more efficient exchanges and cooperation between scientific communities from China and the world.

During the inauguration ceremony on Wednesday, Yu Yingjie, vice-mayor of Beijing, said that the capital is one of China's most resourceful and active contributors to scientific and technological innovations, hosting over 90 universities, over 1,000 research institutions and nearly 30,000 high-tech companies.

He said the capital also has over 470,000 active research and development personnel, the most in the country. As a result, the cluster will create new ways to expand international collaboration in innovation and participate in global governance of science and technology, Yu said.

470,000+ people
are actively involved in research and development in Beijing, the most in the country.

Shu Wei, vice-president of the China Association for Science and Technology, said the cluster would grant more opportunities for Chinese scientists and engineers to contribute their knowledge to the world, thus facilitating a global scientific community built on openness, trust and cooperation.

Li Yi, deputy director-general of the Beijing Foreign Affairs Office, said Beijing is becoming a global science and technology hub, hosting headquarters from 111 international organizations, about a quarter of which are science and technology organizations.

Li said that the Beijing government would continue to optimize services for international organizations and foreign professionals, issue policies to facilitate international exchange, and connect the capital with global resources to support its quality development.

Wu Xiaojie, chief of Chaoyang, said the district has an industrial foundation and business environment that are conducive to supporting international science and technology innovation.

Wu said the district would build more international hospitals, schools and apartments for foreign talent.

"We would like to sincerely invite international sci-tech professionals and organizations to call Chaoyang their home and jointly share the opportunities for progress and cooperation," he added.

Shen Jie, executive vice-president of the Beijing Association for Science and Technology, said the cluster would capitalize on its ability to pool talent to support international science and technology organizations.

Eric Ameca, an ecology professor at Beijing Normal University and a member of the International Society of Zoological Sciences, said having various international organizations close to one location would make communication and collaboration easier.

Ameca said China's ecological research and conservation have seen massive interest and support over the last decade, often involving international experts and collaborators.

"Beijing is a perfect location for researchers across the country to come together and, at the same time, bring international experts to share knowledge, contribute and work in a better way," he said.

Muhammad Fahad Baqa, a member of the International Society for Digital Earth and a doctoral candidate at the Aerospace Information Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said his area of study relies heavily on international cooperation and open science, given its role of using satellite and remote sensing technologies to support fact-based decision-making.

These data can be used to combat natural disasters such as floods, droughts, wildfires and pests, he said.

The new cluster of headquarters will promote academic exchange, open science and global collaboration that are crucial for achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goals, he added.

3 police officers detained after journalist attacked

By CAO YIN
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Three police officers in Bijie city, Guizhou province, were dismissed from duty and detained for attacking and injuring a journalist, according to a release posted by a joint investigation team on Thursday.

One of the attackers, surnamed Xiong, was deputy head of the police station in Machang township in Zhijin county, while the others — surnamed Tao and Li — were auxiliary police officers at the station, the release said.

Xiong and Tao have been given 20-day administrative detentions, while Li has received 15 days, it stated. Xiong was removed from his post, and Tao and Li have been dismissed.

In addition, the deputy Party secretary of Machang, surnamed Peng, has also been removed from her post for allegedly playing a leading role in the incident.

According to the release, the police station in Maochang township, a township near Machang, received a call at 6:22 pm on Tuesday from a journalist who claimed that he had been attacked at a nearby hydroelectric plant.

> "The incident has taught us a lesson and exposed the poor grasp some officials have of the law. The attack harmed the media and had a negative effect on society."
>
> A release posted by a joint investigation team in Bijie city, Guizhou province

Police arrived at the scene and took the reporter to a hospital nearby, where he was found to have sustained multiple soft tissue injuries.

The release identified the reporter as a man surnamed Li, but Sixth Tone, a news portal based in Shanghai, said his full name is Li Xiangcheng.

Li works for Jimu News in Hubei, the release said.

The attack aroused the attention of the Bijie government, which quickly set up a joint investigation team to look into the matter. The team included members from its public security bureau and its commission for political and legal affairs.

The release stated that Li used his smartphone to film a vehicle that he saw following him on his way to Shaba village, where he was heading to gather information for a story on Tuesday.

The vehicle, which was carrying the three police officers, overtook him and blocked his path. The three got out and attempted to stop him from filming.

They fought with Li, injuring his face and other parts of his body, and they broke his smartphone and glasses, the release said.

"The incident has taught us a lesson and exposed the poor grasp some officials have of the law. The attack harmed the media and had a negative effect on society," it stated. "We would like to apologize to the journalist and accept the public's criticisms."

According to Sixth Tone, Li was investigating the deaths of two teachers at the time of the attack.

The deaths occurred on April 13 when a hydroelectric station reportedly released a surge of water into a river where a small group of teachers had gathered.

Family members of the deceased teachers said the group had been sent to the river by school leaders to collect pebbles and pine cones to decorate the campus, but a local official has denied this account. An investigation into the deaths is ongoing.

Li, the journalist, talked to Chinese media on Thursday about the day he was attacked, saying that he saw a van following him at around 4:30 pm Tuesday. The van blocked his path as he arrived at the hydroelectric station 30 minutes later, he said.

"The three grabbed my phone and threw it on the ground after getting out of the van. When I moved to pick the phone up, they punched me and knocked my glasses off," the reporter said. "I held my head, and they punched me about six or seven times. The attack lasted for about one minute.

"On my way to hospital, You Xinjian, Party chief of Zhijin county, met me, and he accompanied me for examination and treatment," he said. "The official apologized to me at the time."

Li also expressed his great thanks for the care he received, adding that he is in stable physical condition.

Court settles Tencent, Douyin copyright issues

By TAN YINGZI in Chongqing
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Chongqing courts have facilitated reconciliation between tech giants Tencent and Douyin by requiring their short-video platforms to filter and intercept videos that infringe on copyrights.

Tencent has filed a series of lawsuits in recent years against short-video app Douyin, which is operated by ByteDance, alleging unauthorized use of copyrighted content.

In June 2021, Tencent filed a lawsuit with the Chongqing No 1 Intermediate People's Court, arguing that content uploaded by some users on Douyin infringed on the copyright of *Soul Land*, known as *Douluo Dalu* in Chinese, a TV series produced by Tencent Video.

It asked the court to order compensation for economic losses and reasonable expenditures totaling 61.6 million yuan ($8.7 million). Tencent later increased the claim to 800 million yuan.

From June to Dec 10, 2021, Tencent sued Douyin 168 times in 13 provinces, according to a report by the Chinese media outlet ThePaper.cn.

In the same year, ByteDance also sued Tencent at the Chongqing No 1 Intermediate Court, claiming there were a large number of infringing videos involving the TV series *Sword Out*, also known as *Liang Jian* in Chinese, on Tencent Video.

It asked the court to order Tencent to delete the infringing videos, issue a statement of apology and pay 10 million yuan in compensation for economic losses.

> "They reconciled on the short-video copyright infringement case ..., effectively guaranteeing the healthy and orderly development of the internet video industry."
>
> **Li Yongli,** president of the Chongqing Higher People's Court

In early April, the two parties reached a partnership agreement to explore the joint promotion of short and long videos after years of copyright disputes.

"We mediated between the two parties, and they reconciled on the short-video copyright infringement case with the highest litigation amount in the country (800 million yuan), effectively guaranteeing the healthy and orderly development of the internet video industry," said Li Yongli, president of the Chongqing Higher People's Court, in its latest work report on intellectual property rights trials.

The report said that from 2020 to 2022, Chongqing courts handled 70,847 IPR cases, the most in western China.

A number of major intellectual property cases involving the internet, standard patents, new plant varieties and well-known brands have been properly heard, it said.

Reptiles released

Guests and staff release Chinese alligators during a ceremony at a nature reserve in Jingxian, Anhui province, on Thursday. Twenty artificially bred alligators were released into the wild with satellite trackers. ZHANG QIANYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Heat wave in southern China breaking records

By LI HONGYANG
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Southern China has been experiencing a scorching heat wave with record-breaking temperatures, the national weather service said.

Since May 26, regions including Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan and Guangdong provinces have seen temperatures over 35 C, while temperatures in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces have surpassed 40 C.

Chen Tao, chief forecaster at the National Meteorological Center, said that Typhoon Mawar is a major cause of the heat wave.

As the typhoon moves, the subtropical high pressure system has strengthened and expanded its impact area, eventually controlling temperatures in much of the region south of the Yangtze River, he said.

It is expected that the heat wave will last until Monday, the center said.

The water level at the Chenglingji Station at Dongting Lake, the second largest freshwater lake in China, was recorded at 23.33 meters, about 3.6 meters lower than the average level for this time of year. It also marks the lowest water level ever for the lake during this time.

Despite being one of the southern provinces with abundant precipitation, Hunan province has been experiencing a shortage of rainfall this year. According to meteorological and hydrological departments, as of Wednesday the accumulated precipitation in the province was just 563 millimeters, 11.6 percent lower than average for the same period in previous years.

23.33 meters
The water level at the Chenglingji Station at Dongting Lake, the second largest freshwater lake in China, about 3.6 meters lower than the average level for this time of year

In a news release on May 3, the World Meteorological Organization said the likelihood of an El Nino occurring in the second half of the year is increasing, and the event would fuel high temperatures globally.

El Nino is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon that starts with unusually warm surface water in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, which then affects weather worldwide. It occurs on average every two to seven years, and one episode typically lasts nine to 12 months, the WMO said.

Various analyses suggest that 2023 or 2024 will very likely set a record for the warmest year globally, the National Climate Center said.

CHINA

Efforts sought to curb minors' online addiction

Experts call for stricter supervision on renting out video game accounts

By CAO YIN
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Legal experts have called for cyberspace departments to tighten supervision over e-commerce platforms and ban them from selling or renting online video game accounts meant for adults to juveniles to help prevent children from becoming addicted to the internet.

The experts have also suggested game service providers strengthen facial recognition.

Their advice came after some children were found to be playing games for longer than they're allowed by using adult accounts that had been bought or rented to evade identity verification from the game platforms.

For example, a mother in Tianjin complained that her son, a middle school student surnamed Liu, recently used a rented account to play online games late at night, sometimes going to bed after 11 pm, according to a recent report from Legal Daily.

"If accounts are easily obtained from the internet, our country's measures against addiction to online games among children, such as regulations, will be meaningless," the paper quoted the mother as saying.

In August 2021, the National Press and Publication Administration issued a regulation clarifying that all online video game service providers can only allow minors to play between 8 pm and 9 pm on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

It also ordered game providers to adopt real-name registration of users and take more action to prevent children under 18 from becoming obsessed with online games.

Since then, many providers have set up a system to reduce gaming time for juveniles and are now requiring users to register accounts with real identities, according to a report jointly released by the game division of the China Audio-video and Digital Publishing Association and the China Game Industry Research Institute in November.

The report said that the regulation has helped curb online game addiction among children, citing data from Tencent, a large Chinese online game service provider, which noted that online gaming time spent by minors in July 2022 fell 92 percent year-on-year.

However, on a few gaming sites, some children were able to register fraudulently by using adults' identification cards, which allowed them to rent or buy accounts meant for older gamers and spend more time online.

"Renting or selling game accounts to minors is illegal," said Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Communication Law Research Center at the China University of Political Science and Law. "If youngsters can bypass the anti-addiction system in this way, the system's designer has failed."

Zhu Jie, a lawyer at the Chongqing branch of the Tahota Law Firm, said, "Our country has made it clear that no one is allowed to sell or rent online game accounts to children, so those engaged in this industry could be committing the crime of operating a business illegally."

While conducting a search, China Daily easily found game providers renting online accounts for adults on e-commerce platforms. Some providers were found to be renting such accounts more than 100,000 times per month.

Generally, game accounts in China are linked with the personal identities of users, and user agreements typically specify that these accounts should not be rented or traded in any form without the company's authorization, let alone to minors.

"E-commerce platforms should enhance supervision on their own," Zhu Jie said, suggesting that they should either root out vendors selling or renting game accounts through keyword searches, or increase the number of employees tasked with reviewing whether products or services sold online are legal.

Calling for cyberspace regulators to harshly punish e-commerce platforms that are found to have indulged in illegal businesses, he said that online game providers also need to upgrade their technologies to strengthen their facial recognition systems.

But he stressed that at the same time, personal information must be protected, and game providers should get permission from users before collecting their facial images.

Furthermore, both Zhu Wei and Zhu Jie suggested that government agencies, including those engaged in education and culture, as well as schools, work together to guide children to make use of their spare time wisely. They also urged parents to set up software to help limit their children's internet surfing time.

In recent years, media headlines have often highlighted children's addiction to online games, including extreme cases in which they harmed themselves or others after being influenced by the games, triggering public concern.

Chinese authorities have taken steps to fight the problem through legislation, policymaking and game design.

In October 2020, for example, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, adopted an amended Law on the Protection of Minors, stating that internet service providers are obliged to prevent children from becoming addicted to the internet by controlling the amount of time that users under age 18 spend playing video games.

Another regulation issued by the National Press and Publication Administration in 2019 also clarified that paid online services must not be open to users younger than 8, and any harmful content, such as pornography, violence and gambling, must be prohibited.

Learning while riding

Members of the Chinese Young Pioneers ride on exercise bikes in their new headquarters in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Thursday. Children can take virtual tours while riding and answer related questions on their screens, giving them the chance to learn as they work out. LI ZHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sexual assault of children increasing, white paper says

By YANG ZEKUN
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Though the total number of crimes targeting minors is declining, the number of sexual harassment cases against them is rising, a white paper said.

The Supreme People's Procuratorate issued the White Paper on Procuratorial Work of Minors (2022) on Thursday, International Children's Day, urging authorities to strictly punish people who commit crimes against minors and calling on the judiciary and society as a whole to better protect them.

According to the document, the number of people arrested and prosecuted for crimes against minors last year decreased by 14.1 percent and 3.54 percent, respectively, compared with 2021.

Yet last year, 36,957 people were prosecuted for sexually assaulting children, including rape and molestation, up 20.4 percent year-on-year.

In addition, the number of people prosecuted for crimes against children under age 14 increased from 27,234 in 2020 to 34,066 people in 2022, reflecting the urgent need to strengthen the protection of minors, the white paper said.

Procuratorates have always held a zero-tolerance stance toward crimes against minors and have worked closely with other departments to crack down on crimes that infringe upon children's rights and interests, including sexual assault and trafficking, it said.

The SPP and the Ministry of Public Security launched a crackdown on sexual assault and trafficking last year, and supervised and followed up on more than 70 major cases involving minors. Procuratorates have continuously suggested stronger punishments for people who sexually assault children as well as those who traffic them.

Judicial departments also studied and developed interpretations and documents to standardize the handling of cases involving infringements on minors.

The SPP had jointly established 2,053 "one-stop" investigation zones for handling crimes against children with other government or public agencies across the country by the end of last year.

Procuratorates also provided diversified and comprehensive assistance to 17,000 minors last year, it said.

In October, the SPP submitted a special report about procuratorial work related to minors to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, to analyze the judicial protection of minors and the progress of related work, suggesting that society should fulfill its obligations and participate in the comprehensive protection of minors.

According to the white paper, procuratorates have continued to implement the mandatory reporting system for related cases and have intensified efforts to raise awareness about the system.

A mechanism to help review past cases has also been established that could help ensure they were reported properly, it said.

In 2022, prosecutors took another look at 26,000 cases involving child victims and found that more than 2,900 were not reported by people who were obligated to do so. Ultimately, 504 people were held accountable in those cases.

Procuratorates have also intensified efforts to crack down on cybercrimes, which are becoming more complex and diversified, and have provided more assistance for child victims of these crimes, according to the document.

Meanwhile, from 2020 to 2022, the number of people prosecuted for crimes against children in rural areas accounted for only 4.3 percent to 4.7 percent of crimes against minors.

Procuratorates also strengthened judicial protection of minors in rural areas, with a focus on investigating cases involving sexual assault, injuries from violence and trafficking of minors, as well as those in which adults lure and coerce minors into participating in criminal organizations, it said.

By the end of last year, 2,207 procuratorates at all levels had set up juvenile procuratorial departments to promote the establishment of a legal supervision system for the protection of minors that integrates punishment of crimes, education and correction, protection of rights and interests, and crime prevention, it said.

Number of juveniles arrested, prosecuted on the rise

By YANG ZEKUN

The number of juvenile delinquents arrested and prosecuted in 2022 had risen substantially from two years earlier, according to the White Paper on Procuratorial Work of Minors (2022), issued by the Supreme People's Procuratorate on Thursday.

According to the document, the number of juvenile suspects arrested increased by 30.2 percent in 2022 from 2020, while those prosecuted climbed 42.8 percent over the same period.

Minors suspected of offering assistance to telecom and online crimes increased significantly, with the number of those investigated soaring from 236 in 2020 to 5,474 in 2022, it said.

On the other hand, the proportion of drug crimes committed by children, the number of campus bullying and violent crimes and the rate of reoffending all continued to decrease.

Procuratorial organs strictly implemented the policy of "education, reform and rescue" and combined punitive measures with precise help and educational measures to treat juvenile offenders and save them from a life of crime, the document said.

In 2022, procuratorates also approved the non-prosecution policy for 26,161 juvenile offenders and initiated public lawsuits against 820 minors for violating regulations or recommitting crimes during the conditional non-prosecution period, it said.

The SPP also promoted the construction of special schools and specialized education, where juvenile offenders with serious behaviors could receive correctional education, it said.

In addition, procuratorates have deepened the centralized and unified handling of juvenile crimes by examining the necessity of detention, supervising the regulatory activities of minors in custody and overseeing community correction to ensure assistance and educational measures could always be accessible, it said.

Celebration of childhood

Performers put on a gala at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. Involving some 1,000 children, the program was held on Wednesday and Thursday to celebrate International Children's Day. It will be broadcast on multiple platforms on Saturday night. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lao students visit Beijing as part of BRI activity

By LI YINGQING and WANG SONGSONG

One hundred Laotian students age 10 to 12 gathered at the China Science and Technology Museum in Beijing on Wednesday to learn about the nation's scientific and technological achievements.

It was the latest stop on the children's 16-day journey in China aimed at promoting exchanges and mutual understanding between children from both countries.

Part of the sixth "Belt and Road People to People" activity, the visit was co-hosted by the China Charity Federation and the Laotian Ministry of Education and Sports, and coincided with the 73rd International Children's Day.

Zhou Zhifen, secretary-general of the news volunteer charity promotion committee of the China Charity Federation, said the activity gave the children a chance to make friends, and that hopefully they will contribute to the development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

"Our goal is to play our part in the friendly exchanges between Chinese and Laotian people," Zhou added.

Keota, a Laotian student, was excited after taking a ride in a two-person gyroscope machine called a Space Ring, which evolved from a simulator used during pilot and astronaut training.

"It's scary but fun, and I am not afraid. I was told that Chinese astronauts' training is 10 times as intense as it is now. That's impressive. It proves that they are healthy and strong," she said.

"China and Laos cooperate in space programs. I hope one day I can become an astronaut and, on behalf of Laos, enter China's space station. It's very challenging and exciting. I hope I can make it," she added.

Lautdaphon and Souksombath, two other Laotian students, said they had only seen exhibitions on China's space technologies and achievements on television before and were happy to experience them in real life.

Sayakone, one of the leaders of the Laotian group, told China Daily that children are very interested in such aerospace technologies.

"I am quite interested in satellite technology, including satellite models and pictures of their development," he said. "I can clearly see the process from production to application. These technologies and materials are not available in Laos."

The students traveled to China via the China-Laos Railway, a flagship project under the BRI, from Vientiane, capital of Laos, to Yunnan province on May 23.

They have since visited Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture and Kunming in Yunnan, and then Beijing. Next, they will travel to Xi'an in Shaanxi province, Xiamen in Fujian province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

Organizers of the activity, which was initiated in 2018, originally invited students from nine BRI countries to China to make friends with Chinese students that year and in 2019. Over the next three years, they sent health packages to students from BRI nations to help them fight COVID-19.

Contact the writers at wangsongsong@chinadaily.com.cn

Lao students watch a simulation model of the Chang'e 5 lunar probe at the China Science and Technology Museum in Beijing on Wednesday. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

BRI 10 YEARS ON

Editor's note: *This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative. A decade of practice has de*
In a more than 10-part series, China Daily finds out how the road of peace, prosperity, openness, gr

A couple pose for a photo at Wat Arun, or the Temple of Dawn, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok, on Wednesday. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

THAI PRODUCE GROWING CHINA A

Exporters of tropical fruits such as durian eye stronger

Chinese tourists visit the Grand Palace in Bangkok on Feb 7. Thailand gave a warm welcome to the first tour groups from China with specially p WANG TENG / XINHUA

By **YANG WANLI** in Bangkok
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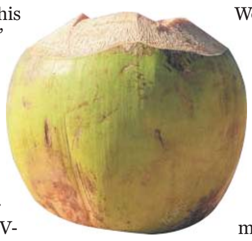
Since late April, Wootichai Kunjet has been in his annual "super busy" mode, monitoring daily precipitation waterfall and soil quality. The 40-year-old Thai national is not a scientist, but a durian farmer who is eyeing his first truly fruitful harvest season in three years as the sector shakes off the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and returns to normal in international trade.



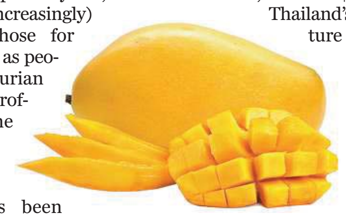
Owning a durian orchard of 14.4 hectares, Wootichai makes an annual gross income of 10 million Thai baht ($296,150) from the thorny fruit. With an output of about 150 metric tons of durian a year, his orchard is located in Chanthaburi, an eastern Thai province that is famous for durian and other tropical fruit such as mangosteen, rambutan and longan.

Like most other farmers in the province, Wootichai's biggest market is China.

Many farmers in Chanthaburi speak at least a little Chinese. Apart from *nihao* (hello) and *zaijian* (goodbye), "*haochima*? (yummy?)" is among the oft-spoken Chinese words.

Wootichai, who is the president of the Thai Durian Association, said about 80 percent of durians in Chanthaburi were exported to China and that the trading volume has kept growing in recent years.

"Chinese market provides Thai fruit farmers stable incomes. The (Chinese) enthusiasm for durian has reshaped the orchards in Chanthaburi. In the past 10 years, durian orchards (increasingly) replaced those for other fruits as people see durian (as) more profitable," he said.



Wootichai's family has been growing durian for three generations. "Compared with the older generation, we are more focused on the fruit quality instead of the quantity," he said, taking out an iPad and showing a system that collects data on two key indicators — water amount and soil nutrients — in his orchard, that provide guidance to workers on how much extra water and fertilizers are needed for optimum crop yield.

The monitoring system was procured from Austria. Wootichai said the younger generation is opting for smart farming and more scientific inputs.

"The ultimate competitive power is the taste of the durian. The best durian grows under the best environmental conditions … The greatest durian tastes creamy with a concentrated flavor and rich nutrition, and that should be guaranteed by scientifically guided caring," he said.

A report by Chinese e-commerce giant JD last year suggested that durian was most popular among young people, with over 60 percent of the fruit in China being bought by consumers aged between 16 and 35.

Consuming power

"This spiky fruit with high nutrition is believed as the 'Fruit King' and welcomed by Chinese people, especially the younger generation. To some, eating durian is not simply a taste of tropical fruit, but a way of showing their consuming power," said Zhang Jingming, a Chinese durian trader in Chanthaburi.

Durian is the No 1 imported fruit in China. Data from Thailand's commerce ministry show that China was the largest export market for Thai durian last year, accounting for more than 96 percent of the total export volume, valued at $3.09 billion.

Thailand's Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives estimated that the exports are expected to grow 9.8 percent this year, reaching a value of 120 billion baht.

According to Keerati Rushchano, permanent secretary of Thailand's Ministry of Commerce, fresh fruit exports to China are anticipated to increase by at least 10 percent this year based on better land transport flow as cross-border trade facilitation improves.

He said the transport of fresh fruit across land borders is expected to increase significantly, with durian accounting for 80 to 90 percent of the transported fruit.

Durian exports to China had suffered from unstable prices over the past three years due to logistics problems from the impact of COVID-19, said Kamon Poomipongthai, representative of the Modern Age Fruit Trade Association in Chanthaburi.

The association has exported about 100 containers of fresh fruit to the Chinese mainland. For premium products, airfreight is their main choice despite the high costs, which could be nearly triple compared to transporting by sea or by land.

"Taste is the biggest value of fresh fruits. Chinese demand for premium Thai fruits is driven by the quality, which can only be guaranteed by the logistics," Kamon said, while expressing confidence about the prospects of railway logistics as the China-Laos-Thailand Railway is speeding up construction on the Thai section of the cross-border rail link.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, proposed in 2013, the rail link will be an important connection between China and Southeast Asia for boosting personnel exchanges, and other communications among countries along the railway.

A Thai farmer checks an agricultural drone manufactured by a Chinese company in Roi Et on Aug 1. WANG TENG / XINHUA

A girl works at a construction site o Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Tha

According to data from the World Bank, the China-Laos Railway has significantly reduced land transport costs by as much as 40 to 50 percent between Laos' capital city of Vientiane and China's Yunnan provincial capital city, Kunming, and potentially increased the aggregate income of Laos by up to 21 percent after connecting the landlocked country to the vast Belt and Road network.

As a member of ASEAN, which has a free-trade agreement with China, Thailand enjoys a preferential policy that allows products, including fresh fruits, to enjoy tariff-free status. The China-Laos-Thailand rail route runs south from Vientiane, crosses the border to Thailand at Nong Thai, and its free trade zone, and continues to Bangkok, the country's capital, which is about a three-hour drive from Chanthaburi.

Driving toward green future via incentives for EV sector

By **YANG WANLI** in Bangkok

Heading southeast for two hours by car from Thailand's capital Bangkok along the country's eastern coastline, several huge clusters of car plants can be seen nestled amid tropical forests, promising a green revolution for the auto industry in Thailand and Southeast Asia, through the embrace of electric vehicles, or EVs.

As Asia's fourth-largest automobile assembly and export hub for carmakers, Thailand has enhanced its attractiveness as an EV production base by offering incentives to set up such plants, with Chinese brands winning growing recognition.

According to the Thailand Automotive Institute and the government's Department of Land Transport, sales of pure electric vehicles in Thailand reached 13,454 units last year, up a whopping 600 percent compared to the 2021 level.

Behind the dramatic surge in the country's EV industry, Chinese brands are undoubtedly the most visible force, said Wichai Kinchong Choi, senior vice-president at Kasikornbank, a leading Thai bank.

"With its innovative and advanced technology, Chinese EV brands are now making a turning point in the country's auto market that used to be monopolized for decades by Japan and other Western brands. Moreover, they have helped to improve Thai employment," he said.

At Great Wall Motor's new energy vehicles, or NEV, plant in Thailand's Rayong Province, the Chinese company's first overseas NEV production factory, a total of 11,616 vehicles were made last year, adding to the total output of 15,320 vehicles delivered since the brand's launch in Thailand in 2021.

Production in the plant is conducted by about 1,000 workers. Of these, about 95 percent are Thai employees, according to Li Guangyu, Great Wall Motor's ASEAN regional vice-president of manufacturing.

"With the continuous improvement in both the sales network and product lineup, we aim to achieve 15,000 or 18,000 deliveries in the Thai market this year. In the near future, our plant is expected to have all workers from Thailand except for a few Chinese for the management team," he added.

Visitors view an electric vehicle exhibited at the Thailand International Motor Expo 2022 in Bangkok on Dec 1. WANG TENG / XINHUA

Wind turbines supplied by China's Goldwind, as seen in this picture in Chaiyaphum on Oct 4, help to generate clean energy. SONG YU / XINHUA

More chance

Choochat Phonphoem, 42, who has worked in Great Wall Motor's Rayong plant for nearly two years, said he earns a basic monthly income of nearly 18,000 baht ($534) with a bonus based on production performance. "The wage is higher than in my previous (job) in another car plant and has been stable even during the COVID-19 pandemic," he said.

The job also offers him more chances to learn Mandarin and Chinese culture. Now he can speak some basic sentences in Chinese, such as a brief self-introduction. In the canteen, he said workers can have options for traditional Chinese cuisine, including dishes like Kung Pao Chicken and scallion.

As China and Thailand have had more collaborations and exchanges in recent years amid China's Belt and Road Initiative, Choochat said people from the two countries understand each other better.

"My 12-year-old daughter's school also offers Mandarin classes. I believe China and Thailand will see closer partnerships in the future," he said, adding that Shanghai is among the top choices on his travel wish list as he is impressed by the city's mix of historical sites and modern vibes, as seen on social media.

Bridging the differences is a core task for Chinese companies going overseas. And it has been the same

monstrated that it's a broad and prosperous way for China and the world to share opportunities and seek common development.
een development, innovation and civilization will contribute more to the shared future of mankind.

SEES PPETITE

trade with key market

prepared gifts and flowers after China resumed outbound group tours.

Customers check durians at an event featuring Thai fruits in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region on May 13.
HUANG YANMEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

of the China-Thailand railway in ailand, on Feb 23. WANG TENG / XINHUA

"The initiative is very important to Thailand, which is accelerating the implementation of the Thailand 4.0 strategy and the Eastern Economic Corridor, emphasizing economic integration and all forms of development through the use of innovation, knowledge and creativity," said Korn Dabbaransi, former Thai deputy prime minister and president of the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association.

For Thailand, the BRI helps to restore the economy with new engines of growth, he said. And the infrastructure and regulatory linkages facilitated by the subregional framework of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand through the BRI are expected to enhance regional economic integration and better connect the ASEAN with the global economy.

"The improved infrastructure construction and strengthened bilateral trade between Thailand and China will definitely (bolster) the two countries' demand and supply chains," said Ukrit Wongthongsalee, chairman of the Chanthaburi Chamber of Commerce.

He said that Chinese consumers are aware of only a limited number of durian types, such as the Monthong or Jin Zhen Tou (Golden Pillow).

"In fact, there are hundreds of durian species in Thailand, with each having its (own) unique flavor and taste that deserves a place in the Chinese market," he said, citing names such as Nokyip (a species widely appreciated by local Thai people), Ganyao, Chanee, and Puangmanee (a species that has a taste very similar to that of the Musang King variety in Malaysia).

"For some species, such as Chanee, the golden taste period only has one day. If you have tried Chanee at its golden period once in your lifetime, you will never forget it," Ukrit said.

"We really want to communicate with Chinese consumers more, bringing them informative knowledge and greater diversities of Thailand durian, which is more than just a fruit but a fantastic creature of Mother Nature," he said.

Promising opportunities

Speaking of the outlook for the province's future trade with the world, and China in particular, Ukrit said the BRI will bring promising opportunities to Chanthaburi, known as the "Paradise of Tropical Fruit in Thailand" — with more overseas consumers.

"Our future strategy is to be diversified and sustainable. Durian is our signature product, but definitely not the only one. The orchards of mangosteen, rambutan and longkong will enjoy a bigger share of the market with their premium taste," he said.

Ukrit said more innovations and high-tech should be introduced to make the business sustainable, to explore new processed food products using fresh fruits or recycling the "waste" of fruits — such as shells of durian and pericarp (outermost layer) of mangosteen for their fibers.

"We know that China has very advanced technologies, which we are looking forward to benefiting the fruit industry in Chanthaburi in the near future," he said.

Before achieving the goal of shaping an ideal industrial structure, Ukrit said his business chamber is looking into other more immediate concerns. He said the Thai farmers are currently vulnerable to price fluctuations in the Chinese market, as they do not have a proper risk alert and evaluation system.

Given that situation, some local farmers had piloted a new mechanism — establishing a mangosteen auction center — to make the fruit trade more controllable. The initiative has yielded significant results, according to Ukrit.

The auction center, which was built in 2016, serves as a transparent trading platform for farmers and buyers. Starting from 4 pm every day, orchard owners send fresh mangosteen to the center, which has workers who conduct general selection and classification.

Preparation work for the auction usually ends at around 7 pm. Then, the center comes up with a table of prices for mangosteen with different qualities based on the daily supply. After that, fruit dealers can participate in the auction in accordance with their needs.

Compared with the traditional direct dealing, the auction system has changed the farmers' role from passive to active, as they have a certain say on the price, said Pattama Namwong, president of the Chanthaburi Mangosteen Association, adding that this can "largely reduce" the farmers' risk.

New dealers usually visit the center to confirm the mangosteen quality, she said. But in the case of experienced dealers, they can simply make the deal via phone, which is very convenient.

From a very small group supported by orchard owners, the center has grown to emerge as a big auction center with collective efforts of more than a hundred members, Pattama said, adding she is happy to see farmers benefiting from the scientific management of their produce.

She said about 98 percent of mangosteen in Chanthaburi is exported to China every year. Due to climate reasons, output this year will see a drop, which means higher prices.

"As the Thai-China bilateral trade has gradually recovered and logistics is improving, we are optimistic (about) the future," Pattama said.

Watch the video by scanning the code

Strengthened friendship brings in new 'golden era'

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok

Over the past 10 years since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, remarkable achievements have been made with deepened cooperation between Thailand and China in all fields, including trade, energy, infrastructure, education and innovation, a former Thai official said.

Korn Dabbaransi, who once served as Thailand's deputy prime minister and is now president of the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association, told China Daily that the Thailand-China friendship is entering another golden era following the establishment of a strategic partnership.

Through the BRI, China has offered friendship and opportunities for joint development with all other developing nations in the region, he said, citing the China-Laos Railway as an example.

"The railway, which began operations in 2021, is a landmark project showcasing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation," Korn said. "It now serves as a docking project with Laos' strategy to convert itself from a landlocked country to a land-linked hub."

In the past few months, the China-Laos Railway has opened up a new route for Thai durian exports, easing transportation capacity.

A "fruit train" carrying 23 containers of durians and mangosteens arrived in Kunming in China's Yunnan province in April, as Thai exporters increasingly turn to the China-Laos Railway for fast access to the Chinese market.

"Trains can carry a lot more goods and produce per trip than trucks. Trains also provide a cost-effective transport alternative for farmers looking to export their produce, which is very (good) for local farmers," Korn said.

In recent months, Thailand and Laos have been in talks on the potential of China-Laos-Thailand railway links, which can reduce cargo transport costs by up to 50 percent in the next few years.

"In the near future, people along the railway will be even closer and walk together to prosperity under the Belt and Road Initiative. This is so encouraging," Korn said.

As a foreign politician who has visited China numerous times since the 1970s, Korn said the China-Thailand relationship is not simply just a long-term friendship, but it is more of a brotherhood because people from the two countries are from the same family.

"In my point of view, the initiative proposed in 2013 has told the world where and how China would go with the world. The Belt and Road Initiative is a belt of peace and a road to prosperity," Korn said.

Peaceful development

"Peace must come before prosperity, which is very important, not only to China but also to the whole world. China strongly supports and has also been practicing the peaceful development principle," he said.

With regard to the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association, Korn said the association will continue to spare no effort to promote people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

"Over the past decades, we've been working on increasing mutual understanding" between people of the two countries, he said, adding that Thai schools now have Mandarin classes and thousands of volunteers from China have come to Thailand to teach the Chinese language and facilitate better communication.

"Many volunteers love Thailand so much and couldn't tear themselves away from Thailand when their service term ended," Korn said. "I asked them why. You know what they said? They told me that *zhong tai yi jia qin* (China and Thailand are close as one family)."

Watch the video by scanning the code

Korn Dabbaransi, former deputy prime minister of Thailand and current president of the Thai-Chinese Friendship Association, says the Belt and Road Initiative has yielded remarkable achievements since its launch 10 years ago. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

A worker on the production line of Great Wall Motor's new energy plant in Rayong Province, Thailand, in April. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

case with Great Wall Motor in Thailand. Despite geographical proximity and cultural similarity, Thailand still has its uniqueness in terms of customer preferences. An interesting example is their completely different attitudes in regard to the EVs' "smartness".

"Chinese consumers are fond of those cool AI-supported functions, which communicate with drivers frequently, such as providing safety reminders. But for many Thai consumers, they are more accustomed to a simple relationship between car and driver, with less interaction," said Zhang Zhen, director of brand and communications at Great Wall Motor, or GWM.

"The smart car sensor was the complaint we received most when GWM entered the Thailand market at an early stage. Many customers said it's too annoying for the sensor to give 'beep beep beep' reminders all the time when some objects are too close. But you know in Bangkok, it is inevitable, because motorcycles are everywhere," he said.

Even so, great outcomes were witnessed after prompt adjustments. Last year, GWM sold 11,616 vehicles in Thailand, more than triple the previous year's tally, with a market share of 1.4 percent.

Future trends

"As Chinese EV brands joined the Thai government's subsidy measures, it is not only good news for car buyers who will have more choices, but also for the Thai automotive industry during the transition period to catch up with future trends toward sustainable development," said Li, the ASEAN regional vice-president at GWM.

In the Thai government's 20-year strategy, known as Thai 4.0, Thailand aims to promote the country's innovations on the world stage and transform its economy by using technology and innovation with an environment-friendly policy.

One target of the strategy is to transform Thailand into an EV hub, with electric vehicles making up 30 percent of the total number of automobiles produced by 2030 and phasing out sales of combustion-engine vehicles completely by 2035.

At a recent news conference, Thai government spokesperson Anucha Burapachaisri revealed that EV registrations in Thailand hit 8,522 in March, almost double the January figure of 4,543. He said the promotion of EVs is the country's important stepping stone toward a low-carbon society.

"Thailand 4.0 holds the same vision as China's modernization path, which emphasizes green and sustainable development. Given that shared willingness, China's EV companies can serve as an important driving force to the Thailand 4.0 strategy," said Li.

As the EV industry in the Chinese market has been developed for years, he said China has unique advantages and can share its experiences and innovative technologies for boosting the region's green development.

Li said exchanges and mutual understanding between China and the rest of the world will be enhanced as more Chinese enterprises go overseas, thanks to the BRI.

"This brings a great chance for Chinese people to show the world better. The world, in return, will have a true, vivid portrait of Chinese people."

Hub serves as important link in bilateral relations

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok

China has remained Thailand's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years, and has been a major export market for Thailand's agricultural products. Bilateral trade surged 3 percent year-on-year to $135 billion last year, according to data from China's General Administration of Customs.

Thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative, the Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Zone was co-developed by China's Holley Group and Thailand's Amata Group for Chinese investors. It now serves as an important economic hub for bilateral trade between the two nations.

Established in 2006, the industrial zone was one of China's first overseas industrial sites and has become the biggest industrial cluster and manufacturing export base in Thailand and ASEAN for China's traditionally competitive industries.

Located in Rayong Province, the industrial zone covers an area of 20 square kilometers and is expected to expand to hold 500 companies and create more than 100,000 local jobs. Rayong is a core part of Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor.

Currently, the zone is home to more than 180 Chinese-invested companies, mostly in the automobile, electronics and machinery sectors. So far, the zone has attracted more than $4.3 billion in investment from China and provided more than 45,000 local jobs.

Zhao Bin, president of the Thai-Chinese Rayong Industrial Realty Development Company, which operates the industrial zone, said the construction of infrastructure in the zone is an ongoing effort to better serve businesses investing in Thailand.

He said the construction work included manufacturing, logistics and living zones, which are all well-planned and on track. In the near future, he said the zone is expected to facilitate in-depth cooperation between upstream and downstream industries along the industrial chain.

COMMENT

Editorials

Business community gives lesson to Washington on benefits of cooperation

The global public sphere is rife with narratives about an "exodus" of foreign companies from China, claiming they are leaving en masse.

But things are different in the real world. Unlike Western governments, which have just begun to come to terms with the impossibility of an overall "decoupling" from China and are now shifting toward severing ties in specific areas, multinational corporations seem to be clear-minded about the cost of such politicization of normal business relations. The politically motivated nature of the bid to reshape supply chains is revealed by the use of the term "de-risking", which slyly tarnishes any ties with China as being risk-laden.

Some in the West may detest their countries' politicians and business executives heading to China. But that is how today's world works — countries and businesses are too deeply interwoven to not engage with one another.

"De-risking" may be in vogue as the latest ingredient of political correctness in the West, and as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, companies cannot rely too heavily on specific suppliers or markets. But that is because links may be broken by such unanticipated events, not because there are inherent risks in having business links with a particular country.

Business decision-making may become a formula for self-inflicted damage once it is hijacked by geopolitical calculations.

Some Western politicians seem unable to control their anti-China hysteria. Fortunately, the business world appears to be more sensible about what economic interdependence and its win-win potentials mean.

At the JPMorgan Global China Summit in Shanghai, JPMorgan Chase & Co CEO Jamie Dimon said the United States' disputes with China over security and trade are "resolvable".

Like many Chinese counterparts, he highlighted the need for serious communication. "You're not going to fix these things if you are just sitting across the Pacific yelling at each other. So I'm hoping we have real engagement," he said.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk, too, highlighted the interconnectedness of the two economies. "The interests of the United States and China are intertwined like conjoined twins," Musk said in a meeting with a senior Chinese official on Tuesday.

And, in what is something of a slap in the face for those Western politicians who have been calling for "decoupling", some of the visiting Western business leaders, including Dimon and Musk, have chosen to expand their business presence in the Chinese market.

Not only private capitalists, but also the US Treasury Department is keenly aware of the increasing necessity for the two economies to sustain proper collaboration. Echoing Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's warning against the "decoupling" of the Chinese and US economies, Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Rosenberg reportedly told a Senate banking committee hearing that her department would "seek expanded engagement" with China in order to work through the difficult issues her country faces.

That is a more realistic appraisal of what the two countries need.

Who conducted unnecessarily aggressive acts?

Whatever excuse the US side might offer, it cannot deny the fact that an RC-135 surveillance plane entered the zone in which the People's Liberation Army Navy was conducting routine training in the South China Sea on May 26.

Neither can it alter the fact that the flight route brought the plane to within about 50 kilometers of China's coast at the nearest point.

The PLA Southern Theater Command organized the air force to track and monitor the entire process, and handle the situation in accordance with laws and regulations.

It is absurd for the US to claim that a PLA Navy plane carried out an "unnecessarily aggressive maneuver" during its intercept.

The whole world will be aware of the hypocrisy of the US in making such a ballyhoo after it transformed and sensationalized an errant meteorological research blimp into a "spy balloon" that it blasted out of the sky with a missile. US politicians have on more than one occasion expressed their unease at alleged surveillance that steals US secrets, yet the US military has been clinging to the bad habit of installing cameras on China's doorstep 10,000 kilometers away across the Pacific.

The Pentagon's "concern" is a typical US misdirection.

From April 2020 to April 2021, a CL-604 surveillance plane was even reported to have spied on China 250 times within one year, almost once every working day.

The security of the US should not be based on the insecurity of other nations. But that is what the US has always been doing.

In its statement regarding the issue, the PLA solemnly urged the US to restrain its military and observe international law and agreements so as to prevent any accidents or miscalculations.

The Pentagon's claims of unnecessary aggression by China are probably intended to provide ammunition for US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who will speak at this year's Shangri-la Dialogue, which begins on Friday. Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu is also attending the meeting. However, the two are not expected to talk on the sidelines of the event given the US' aggressive actions, because Beijing sees no point in doing so as the Joe Biden administration constantly belies its friendly words with its deeds.

Among its actions, the US frequently sends aircraft and vessels to conduct close-in reconnaissance on China. The US military has significantly increased the intensity and frequency of its military activities in the South China Sea. It has also persuaded its allies to conduct similar provocations.

It is these moves that are unnecessary, irresponsibly aggressive and the root cause for concern.

IPEF nothing but a Trojan horse for US

The ministerial meeting of the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Framework for Prosperity that concluded in Detroit, Michigan, last week only produced a pact on the supply chains of key materials and products.

Launched in May last year, the 14-member IPEF plans to produce agreements in four areas: trade, supply chains, the green economy and a "fair" economy. The limited fruits of the meeting speak volumes about the concern of the other members. They are clearheaded on the nature of the IPEF being a geopolitical tool of the Joe Biden administration, which is seeking to isolate China in the region. They are wary of the harm that will be done to the world trade system through the IPEF, which is nothing more than a means to imprint the legacy stamp of "America first" on the region.

The supply chain pact, as Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, is "discriminatory" and "exclusive", which ruins the open and inclusive foundation on which the Asia-Pacific region has achieved its economic success. The pact is being carried out with the objective of excluding China from the regional supply chain network, and reforming that network with the US as the new hub.

However, even the participants are well aware that the IPEF does not include the US opening its market wider to member countries through trade policies such as lowering tariffs.

The IPEF is not trade liberalization. That explains why after being formed a year ago, the IPEF remains largely a talking shop. The US' attitude toward the IPEF is based on domestic politics and the need for "competition" with China, rather than its common interests with the participants.

The Biden administration just inherited the "America first" line from the previous administration, but it is trying to create a new world economic order to that effect through the higher labor, environmental protection, safety and other standards.

In this way it hopes to weaken the competitive cost advantages of developing countries in manufacturing sectors.

The IPEF, with its strong geopolitical and ideological attributes, goes against the law of the market, and its value and sustainability are questionable. India announced last year that it was pulling out of the talks on trade, because it saw no benefit to be gained.

The formation and development of the global industry and supply chains are the results of the combined action of market law and enterprise choice. And the problems incurred in that process can be corrected by adjusting some policies, rather than tearing down the entire globalization system to satisfy one country's interests. Promoting free trade does not conflict with strengthening labor, environmental and security goals.

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Zheng Huawei

Opinion Line

India must respond suitably to Chinese journalists' concerns

The Wall Street Journal reports that China and India have effectively kicked out a large number of each other's journalists by refusing to renew their visas.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said at a regular news conference in Beijing on Wednesday, it was New Delhi that started the trend, leaving the Chinese side with no choice but to reciprocate.

It remains unclear how that will benefit India, and what New Delhi intends to do to end the deadlock. Or does it want the two neighbors not to have any correspondents stationed in each other's country, leaving the job of telling Indian and Chinese stories to Western media outlets?

There are more Indian journalists working in China than vice versa. Although Beijing is not interested in a tit-for-tat game, it has more cards than New Delhi to play in the farce that India has started.

As a matter of fact, as Mao pointed out, Chinese journalists have suffered unfair and discriminatory treatment in India for a long time now.

In 2017, the Indian side shortened the validity of visas held by Chinese journalists in India to three months, or even one month, without giving any valid reason. Since 2020, the Indian side has refused to review and approve Chinese journalists' applications to be stationed in India. As a result, the number of Chinese journalists stationed in India has plummeted from 14 in normal times to just one now.

As of Wednesday, the Indian side had not renewed the visa of the last Chinese journalist in the country. The number of Chinese journalists stationed in India is therefore about to drop to zero.

Considering this, the Chinese side has no choice but to take appropriate counter-measures to safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese media organizations.

Mao stressed that China is still willing to maintain communication with India under the principles of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. It is to be hoped that India will reciprocate by responding to China's legitimate concerns, and take concrete steps as soon as possible to create favorable conditions for restoring normal exchanges between the media organizations of the two countries.

— GUANCHA.CN

Time to account for 'invisible overtime'

According to a report in Legal Daily, a court in Beijing has ruled that the time employees spend working outside of the designated work time and place through WeChat and/or other social media platforms qualifies as "invisible overtime", and the employer is obliged to pay for the extra hours.

Experts suggest that labor laws must introduce the concept of "offline rights", which means that, except for statutory or agreed-upon circumstances, employees must have the right to refuse work-related communication through digital tools during non-working hours; also, they should not face any adverse treatment for doing so.

In this era of digitalized office systems, employees can complete most tasks on computers and smartphones without going to an office.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working gained considerable traction. The omnipresence of the internet connects companies and employees, making online communication and collaboration convenient and greatly improving work efficiency.

But its negative impacts should not be underestimated, as employees can feel trapped while their normal rhythm of life is inevitably disrupted.

There have been cases in which employees faced criticism or were dismissed for not responding promptly to messages from superiors after office hours, not clocking in the required number of working hours or not attending online meetings. It is evident that unreasonable invisible overtime is being enforced sometimes, leading to employees suffering losses or even losing their jobs.

So many employees complain about invisible overtime that it is time to regulate working hours in this new era.

This requires relevant departments to strengthen labor supervision and law enforcement while granting employees "offline rights" to rest during non-working hours. Employees should have the right to enjoy life.

The internet has no boundaries, but life has. Therefore, the law needs to empower employees with the right to say "no" to unreasonable invisible overtime.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Enhanced communication reduces trust deficit

Wednesday marked the second anniversary of President Xi Jinping's speech on the promotion of China's international communication work.

Over the past two years, under the guidance of that speech along with other directives he has made in that regard, the country has made tremendous progress in enhancing its international communication ability and strengthening its say in international affairs, which is conducive to forming a favorable external environment for the country, and advancing the building of a community with a shared future for humankind.

It is already a social consensus that the country should have a say in the world that matches its comprehensive national power and international status. And the awareness of the authorities at various levels of that task has risen markedly.

But apart from authorities at various levels and media outlets, China's international communication system also comprises enterprises, think tanks, schools, social organizations and individual residents. And its international communication capacity is based on technology, capital, management, organization, innovation and talents.

All these factors are contributing to the improvement of China's international communication efficiency and its final effects, so that China can be better understood by the world, and the Chinese people can see China's relations with the rest of the world in a more objective and more confident way.

Thanks to the country's enhanced ability in international communication, it can better safeguard its national interests by better rebuffing the rumors, smears and lies propagated by some countries and ensure that a correct understanding of China prevails in the world.

A stronger international communication ability means China can better work with other developing countries to promote reform of the international order in a fair and just direction that better reflects their interests by setting the agenda in multilateral meetings and international organizations. They are no longer the silent majority in the international community that is represented, explained and distorted by a few developed countries.

China's stronger international communication ability also means that it can translate its long history, civilization and unique culture and wisdom into soft power.

But still the country needs to pursue breakthroughs in communication technologies and improve its story-telling skills to break the West's dominance of the world public opinion market, and make its due contribution to reducing the trust deficit in the world.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

VIEWS

China and the World Roundtable | US Debt Crisis

Editor's note: *US stocks fell on Wednesday as investors were worried that the US federal government would default on payments, but the US House of Representatives voted to suspend the US' debt ceiling through to 2025, avoiding federal default at the last minute and sending the bill to the Senate. The US' internal political game can have grave consequences for the world economy. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.*

Gal Luft

US' rising debt is mother of all debt traps

Over the past 60 years, US Congress has raised the debt ceiling 78 times. For most of this period, raising the debt ceiling was a non-event. But over the past decade or so every time the US government reaches its debt ceiling, a drama of global proportions unfolds. Republicans and Democrats blame each other for the looming government shutdown; pundits issue stern warnings of a financial meltdown resulting from default; equity markets fluctuate between hope and fear; and the US president cancels important international engagements in order to deal with the crisis.

When the largest economy and holder of the international reserve currency is on the brink of default, no country can remain indifferent. But make no mistake, this is political theater. US Congress and the administration know too well that shrinking the deficit requires increase in government revenues through taxation coupled with deep spending cuts. Both options are political anathemas. So the only solution is to kick the can down the road and continue the charade that Republicans and Democrats really care about the ballooning debt. They don't.

Republicans like to present themselves as "fiscal conservatives", but their leading presidential candidate for 2024, Donald Trump, the self-proclaimed "king of debt", added more trillions to the national debt in one term than other presidents added in two. Democrats are no better, however, clinging to a dubious economic philosophy known as "modern monetary theory" which holds that "deficits don't matter". This is why the debt ceiling drama always ends the same way: after weeks of brinkmanship and partisan bickering, a last-minute deal is reached to raise the debt ceiling, allowing the administration to re-indulge in overspending for two additional years.

The United States is addicted to debt. With its federal deficit persistently above $1 trillion a year, US debt is growing by leaps and bounds, nearing $32 trillion. Ten years ago, when former US president Barack Obama fought with Republicans to raise the debt ceiling, the debt stood at $16 trillion. In other words, it doubled in just 10 years.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, at the current spending rate the debt is poised to surpass $46 trillion by 2033 which is almost half of today's global GDP. Economic historian Niall Ferguson once said "if you really want to see when an empire is getting vulnerable, the big giveaway is when the costs of serving the debt exceed the cost of the defense budget". The Congressional Budget Office projects that the interest rate on US debt will surpass $1.4 trillion, about the size of today's federal deficit and almost twice today's defense spending.

JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

The author is co-director of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security and co-author of Dedollarization: The Revolt against the Dollar and the Rise of a New Financial World Order (2019).

If any other country had been so reckless, its credit rating would have fallen like a rock. Not the US. The big three credit rating agencies — Moody's, Standard and Poor's and Fitch — together dominating more than 80 percent of the global market, are American. No matter how obscene the US debt level gets these agencies continue to rate US government bonds as "prime grade". These rating agencies could be easily coerced if they step out of line and downgrade the very same government that regulates them. This biased grading misleads central bankers all over the world as well as pension funds, hedge funds and other institutional investors into buying more US debt.

At what point will the music stop? It's already slowing, it seems. With the de-dollarization concept becoming mainstream, central bankers are increasingly reluctant to over-expose themselves to dollar-denominated debt. In 2022, the total ownership of Treasury securities held by foreign countries fell by a quarter of a trillion dollars. The federal deficit for the same year reached $1.38 trillion.

The US administration needs to borrow more and more money, but the global appetite for US Treasuries is weakening. And that's why the US administration must increasingly rely on its own public to finance the deficit. But to attract so much domestic money, the government would have to offer higher interest rates which could in turn send the economy into a recession.

Debt addiction is not only a US problem. It is endemic to most developed countries. With the exception of Canada and Germany, other G7 countries that lectured recently in Hiroshima on the dangers of China's so-called debt traps have debt greater than their GDP. Japan, the host of the G7 summit, has a debt-to-GDP ratio of 225 percent. Compare this to the five Central Asian countries, whose leaders attended the China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, around the same time. Their ratio is only 30 percent.

Rich countries can borrow as much money as they wish and provide their citizens with perks and entitlement programs people in developing countries can only dream of. Developing countries are forced to stabilize their currencies through the purchase of debt instruments denominated in rich economies' currencies like the dollar or the euro. This facilitates the biggest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in history.

This unjust system has run its course and a global financial reform is long overdue. But don't count on Western politicians to take any action to avoid a financial meltdown one minute before they must. It is up to the Global South to draw the line and direct world attention to the mother of all debt traps — the G7's out-of-control borrowing practices.

Sadly, if history is our guide, the only way major powers can deal with unsustainable debt levels is to embark on aggressive foreign policy, militarization and provocation and to instigate war against one or more of their major lenders, or — even better — pit them against each other, in the hope that post-war negotiations would result in debt cancellation, restructuring, asset seizure or reparations.

Indeed, when it comes to unsustainable debt, war is the only realistic alternative to bankruptcy. Which is why the debt ceiling drama in Washington and the deteriorating US-China relations should be viewed as two scenes from the same plot.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Maya Majueran

Why nations are seeking alternatives to the dollar

After World War II, the US dollar became the prime global reserve currency. Since then the US dollar has been dominating international trade, and has become the dominant currency in international banking and a safe foreign exchange reserve for financial institutions and businesses across the globe.

The dollar's status as the global reserve currency was paved by the Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944, where 44 countries agreed to establish the International Monetary Fund and what in 1945 became the World Bank Group. But despite being founded by more than 40 countries, the fundamental principles of the IMF and the World Bank have promoted the interests and ideology of the US and a few other Western European countries by imposing strict and additional conditions on providing assistance for other countries.

As of the end of last year, the US dollar accounted for 58.36 percent of the global foreign exchange reserves, with the dominance of the dollar giving Washington far-reaching advantages over its rivals. For example, unlike other countries, the United States can meet its international obligations, overcome budget constraints, raise expenditure, and give loans or even grants to other countries just by printing more currency notes.

The US has also weaponized the dollar to maintain its global economic and geopolitical position. It has imposed economic sanctions on nearly 40 countries, including Cuba, Russia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran and Venezuela, affecting nearly half of the world's population, causing severe hardship for ordinary people and seriously disrupting economies.

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Additionally, the US Federal Reserve's aggressive tightening policy has made the dollar a much stronger currency. The Fed policy rate is now set within a range of 5 percent to 5.25 percent, up from near zero a year ago. With the dollar continuously gaining in strength, other economies' currencies have been weakening, pushing up the prices of imported goods, including food, fuel and medicine, and exporting inflation to other countries.

A stronger dollar has also increased other countries' borrowing costs, putting more pressure on central banks to raise their respective interest rates, which incidentally will increase consumers' borrowing costs for housing mortgage, car loan and other items at a time when inflation is still very high. As a result, many developing countries with large debts have been hard hit by the strengthening dollar because their external debt stocks and debt service payments are mostly denominated in dollars, making it even harder for them to borrow in the open market to finance their budget deficits.

The emerging market economies are outraged by the dollar's dominance as a reserve currency, and are searching for viable alternative currencies. And with an increasing number of countries choosing to use their own currency to settle bilateral trade payments, the trend of de-dollarization is gaining momentum.

Countries want to diversify their foreign exchange reserves away from the US dollar. Although the dollar accounted for 58.36 percent of the global foreign exchange reserves in the fourth quarter of last year, that share has been falling gradually. On the other hand, the euro accounted for about 20.5 percent of the global foreign exchange reserves at the end of 2022 while the Chinese yuan accounted for nearly 2.7 percent.

Many developing countries have been working to internationalize their currency and promote its use in international trade and investment, and more and more countries are calling for global trade to be conducted in currencies other than the US dollar.

As for China, it has been promoting the use of the yuan in bilateral trade and investment over the past years. In fact, the yuan has become the third-largest currency used for trade settlement and fifth-largest reserve currency.

India, too, is taking steps to promote the use of the rupee in international trade as part of its efforts to boost exports and slow down the depreciation of the rupee, which highlights the pressure a strong dollar has put on the foreign exchange reserves of economies such as India.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude oil exporter, is open to discussing oil trade settlement in currencies other than the US dollar, which could put the petrodollar in danger — and the end of petrodollar will inevitably weaken the US dollar.

And Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has called on developing countries to take measures to replace the US dollar with their own currencies in international trade and urged BRICS member states to decide on an alternative currency for conducting trade. This could have a huge impact on the US dollar, as BRICS members — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — account for one-third of the global economic output, with their combined output being higher than that of G7 economies.

A common BRICS currency could be a game-changer; it could even break the US dollar's global hegemony. Given the desire of the emerging economies to conduct free trade in currencies other than the dollar, ideally the world should have five reserve currencies with equal weight — the US dollar, the euro, the yuan, the rupee and a common BRICS currency — with countries having the freedom to conduct trade in any currency they like.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ni Yueju

Bipartisan politics in Washington threatens world

After the two serious debt ceiling crises in 2011 and 2013, the United States was once again caught in a debt ceiling crisis for over a month, causing widespread concern among the international community over the prospects of the US and global economies.

According to media reports, the House of Representatives passed a bill on Wednesday that would suspend the debt ceiling through to 2025, avoiding a federal default at the last minute. The bill will now go to the Senate.

It is hoped that the US administration will not take its own economy and credit rating lightly, considering that US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said the US has "no good reason to generate a crisis of our own making".

But what is the debt ceiling? A system unique to the US, the debt ceiling is a limit on the total amount of government borrowing. It was first put in place during World War I and gave the Treasury Department blanket authorization to borrow money up to a certain amount to help fulfill the federal government's payment obligations. Its purpose is to prevent the federal government from issuing national debt without limit, thereby helping it avoid "insolvency".

The Treasury Department's authority to borrow money ceases once it reaches the limit, meaning the federal government can no longer issue new debt. The US government would then face a shutdown if the debt ceiling is not raised and defaults on its maturing debt and interest payments.

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Due to its moderate fiscal deficit policy, which can increase government spending and market liquidity and promote economic growth, raising the US' debt ceiling has long been a norm. Since US Congress passed the piece of legislation in 1917, every instance of potential default has been resolved in the final moments or at the last minute by raising the debt ceiling.

In fact, since 1960, the Congress has raised or suspended the debt ceiling 78 times, and the debt limit has increased from about $300 billion to $31.4 trillion, roughly a 105-fold increase.

The recurring "debt crises" in the US can be attributed to several factors. As the scale of the US government's borrowing continues to increase and US politics becomes increasingly polarized, the debate over the debt ceiling has become an important bargaining chip between the Republicans and the Democrats in Congress. Both parties test each other's limits and seek to gain more political leverage out of it. In order to reach a consensus on raising the debt ceiling, the Democrats and Republicans must agree to significantly reduce the deficit in the future.

The main disagreement between the two parties lies in the approach to reducing the deficit. Should it be achieved by "increasing revenue", that is, by raising government income, or by "cost-cutting", meaning reducing government spending?

The Democratic Party, in order to please its traditional low-income supporters, aims to maintain a certain level of social security for them. So the Democrats are reluctant to make significant cuts to their social security and the healthcare programs. Instead, they usually propose to address the fiscal crisis by reducing the defense budget and/or increasing taxes on the wealthy.

On the other hand, the Republican Party, which tends to enjoy more support among the middle class and the rich, opposes any increase in taxes and focuses primarily on budget reforms.

The fact that the two parties have agreed in principle to raise the debt ceiling will prevent the crisis from becoming a "black swan event" affecting the global economy this time. However, the continuous raising of the debt ceiling by Congress means the US government can overdraw in the future without restraint, continuing the cycle of borrowing more to pay off old debts. While this approach can balance the interests of the two parties, their game of brinkmanship poses significant risks, particularly in an era of increasing political polarization and divisions.

If it spirals out of control even once, it will not only severely impact US politics and the US economy but also drag the world economy into a deep economic recession. Therefore, the world must remain vigilant against the US' internal power game.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Advanced manufacturers boosting industry sector

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Thanks to the rapid growth of the manufacturing industry, Shanxi's industrial sectors kept a steady increase in the first quarter of this year.

Statistics show that the local industries above designated size — which refer to enterprises with annual sales revenue of more than 20 million yuan ($2.81 million) — reported an average year-on-year increase of 4.7 percent in the first three months of this year. The rate is 1.7 percentage points higher than the national average.

Driven by the strong performance of advanced manufacturers, the manufacturing industry in Shanxi registered an impressive year-on-year rise of 13.3 percent.

Shanxi has formed a number of manufacturing industry chains in areas such as railway transport equipment, steelmaking and mining machinery. Standing at the top of the chains are advanced manufacturers like CRRC Datong, Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group and Taiyuan Heavy Machinery Group.

Taiyuan Heavy Machinery is one of the fastest-growing companies among Shanxi's manufacturers.

Chen Qing, an executive of the company, said that it had secured orders worth 1 billion yuan for the single product of front-shovel-type mining excavators by May 15. He added that the full-year sales revenue of the product is expected to surpass 2.5 billion yuan.

Founded in the 1950s, Taiyuan Heavy Machinery was one of earliest homegrown heavy machinery builders in the People's Republic of China. It now has one of the most comprehensive product portfolios in the country's coal-mining machinery industry.

In recent decades, it has diversified into the new energy sector, becoming a leading player in the wind power equipment manufacturing industry in Shanxi.

"With our dominance in coal-mining machinery and wind power equipment, our company is now one of the few leading manufacturers in Shanxi in two industries," Chen said. He added that the diversification is in line with Shanxi's economic transformation move, which features upgrading traditional industries toward the directions of efficient and clean operations and fostering emerging industries as new local growth engines.

Also riding the wave of transformation is CRRC Datong, the branch company of China Railway Rolling Stock Corp in the city of Datong.

The company's new, innovative product is a locomotive driven by a storage battery.

The battery-powered locomotive made by CRRC Datong can save 109 yuan per hour in energy consumption, according to Wang Yufei, deputy general manager of the company.

He added that as the locomotive has zero emissions, it can reduce 339.95 metric tons of carbon dioxide discharge per year.

"Trains with such a locomotive can run on conventional railways, free from electricity grids," the executive said.

The company is also one of the producers of the electrified Hexie bullet train locomotive, which accounts for 35 percent of the domestic market. Over the past seven decades, the company has supplied more than 12,000 locomotives to China's railway industry.

"While meeting China's demands for environmentally friendly railway equipment, our next-stage target is to promote the products to the world," Wang said.

Taiyuan Iron and Steel Group, the leading steelmaker in Shanxi, has also devoted a great deal of energy toward developing products for China's sustainability.

Its new product offering is the special steel for the hydrogen industry. Hydrogen is a source of clean energy recently emerging in China.

In October 2021, it completed the research and development for steel used in the storage of hydrogen.

"Developed and produced to meet the requirements for the super-low-temperature and high-pressure storage of hydrogen, ours is the pacesetting product in the industry," an executive of the company said.

Taiyuan Iron and Steel is a competitive player in China's steel industry. It is among the very few manufacturers in the world that can produce broadsheet stainless steel foil with a thickness of less than 0.02 millimeters. The product is produced for applications in specific industries including aerospace, electronics, petrochemicals and automobiles.

Du Juan contributed to this story.

Excavator components are produced at Taiyuan Heavy Machinery's plant. WANG PEIPEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Students look at replica wall paintings at Yuncheng Museum. The original paintings, preserved in the city's Yongle Temple, represent the peak of China's Taoist mural art. PHOTOS BY YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Museum bringing Shanxi history to life

Local institution presents province's culture, traditions for all to see

China Shanxi

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As one of the cradles of the Chinese civilization, the North China province of Shanxi is arousing the interest of researchers and ordinary tourists with its rich wealth of historical and cultural heritage.

A great number of museums in Shanxi, which house an abundance of historical relics and cultural heritage items, are where people develop a stronger understanding of the province's long history and its millennia-long culture and traditions.

Yuncheng Museum in the southwestern Shanxi city of Yuncheng is among these museums.

The museum now has a total of 35,000 exhibits, covering such fields as pottery, porcelain, bronze ware, stone carving, wall paintings and currencies, and reflecting a history dating back to the Paleolithic Period some 1.8 million years ago.

During their visits to the museum, China's central authorities endorsed its crucial role in showcasing China's human history of more than 1 million years, its cultural history of more than 10,000 years and its civilization history of more than 5,000 years.

They noted that the museum should be a vital venue for researchers to make explorations into the long history of China and identify the roots of Chinese civilization.

While calling for efficient preservation of exhibits, the central authorities also required the museum's management to make good use of these cultural legacies, invoking the general public's interest in and pride of the Chinese civilization by "bringing history to life".

A sand table in Yuncheng Museum shows the major historical sites in the city.

Indeed, the management of Yuncheng Museum has put all their effort into bringing history to life by arranging exhibitions with multiple methods and modern tools.

At the main hall of the museum, for instance, there is a huge wall of sculpted reliefs, with themes relating to the historical stories and legends of Yuncheng.

The figures on the wall include Houji, who is said to have been a pioneer of the farming industry; Leizu, who is believed to have innovated silk production with silkworms; and Dayu, who is said to have led a campaign to curb a severe Yellow River flood some 4,000 years ago.

Wei Long is the head of the Yuncheng Center for Cultural Heritage Protection, an institution responsible for the operation of the museum. He has a deep understanding of the local history and the exhibits.

He said that all the figures on the relief wall are the forefathers of the Chinese nation and they all had associations with Yuncheng.

"Houji, for instance, was born in Yuncheng's Jishan county," Wei said. "His expertise in farming helped his tribe grow stronger and stand out against their rivals, which led to the establishment of the powerful Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-256 BC)."

But the periods marked by these figures were not the beginning of Yuncheng's history, Wei said.

"In the village of Xihoudu, archaeologists discovered a site with relics identified as being 1.8 million years old, which might be proof of some of the earliest human activity in China.

"But the miraculous thing about it is not that long history. Some animal bones bore evidence of burning, which may signal proof of the earliest intentional use of fire in the world."

The official said the exhibits in Yuncheng Museum have great significance in historical research.

"It's widely known that China has a civilization of more than 5,000 years," Wei said. "However, the existence of the early periods of the civilization is mainly supported by legends."

He said the exhibits at the museum are offering material evidence for the specific periods, turning legends into real history.

Leizu, the pioneer of China's silk industry, for instance, is a legendary figure with no material proof to support her existence. It is said Yuncheng's Xiaxian county was the birthplace of Leizu.

"One of the exhibits at the museum is the stone-carved silkworm discovered at Xiaxian archaeological site, which was identified as a relic of 6,000 years ago," Wei said. "This indicates Yuncheng might be the source of China's silk industry."

To bring the exhibits to life, Wei said to cultivate a strong force of cultural heritage workers is the key.

He added that the tour guides at the museum are required to improve their competence by carefully studying the history not only relating to the exhibits but also from a comprehensive perspective.

Tour guide Yan Xiaojing, for example, is among the most popular at the museum.

When talking about the exhibits, she said there is something chaining them together. "That's the continuity of the local history," she said.

During a work day in May, she led a group of tourists to the exhibition wall, turning their attention to the reliefs of layers of pottery items.

"There are 10 layers of pottery items, just like where they are on the excavation site," Yan said.

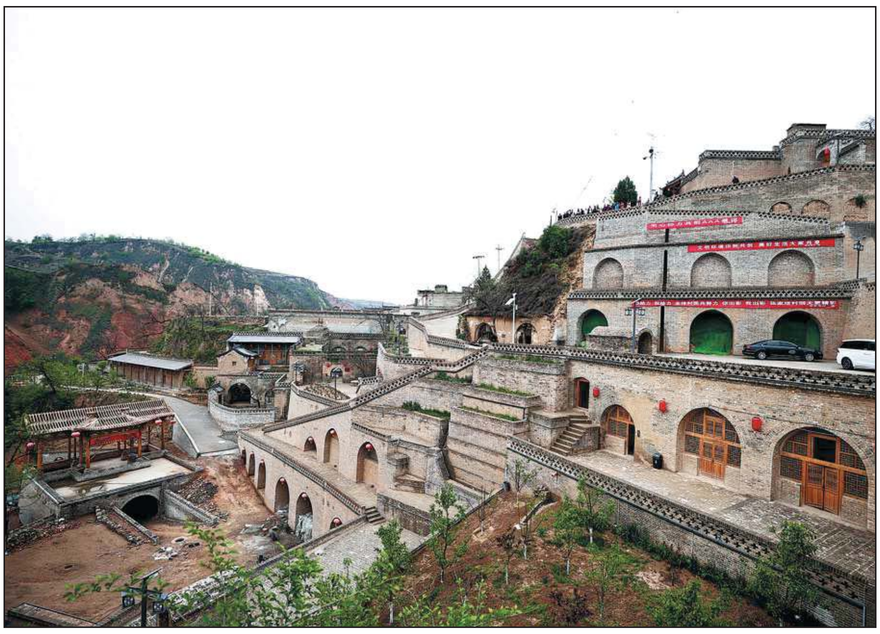
In the bottommost layer are items identified as relics between 7,000 and 5,000 years ago, with styles identical to the Yangshao Culture, a Neolithic culture that existed extensively along the central Yellow River. "Then there are items on the upper layers according to the sequence of periods."

Yan said that the 10 layers correspond to almost every key stage of China's pottery industry development.

In addition to the professionalism of the cultural heritage workers, the museum is also using the latest technologies like virtual reality, augmented reality and holographic displays to present the details and stories of the exhibits, according to Zhou Wenquan, curator of Yuncheng Museum.

Zhang Haiying and Zhou Mingfei contributed to this story.

Traditional village witnesses tourism boom



Relying on its rich historical and cultural resources, the village of Zhangjiata in Fangshan county has developed into an emerging rural tourism destination in Shanxi province in recent years. A village with a history of about 400 years, Zhangjiata's unique selling point is its 36 courtyards with well-preserved ancient cave dwellings. The cave dwellings are a unique type of residence on the Loess Plateau that includes Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces. The village has seen increasing number of tourists and growing tourism revenue since it was included on the list of China's renowned traditional villages. It was recognized as a model village for rural vitalization in Shanxi province in 2022. HOU LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Freight train service growth on track

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Loaded with automobile components and machines, a train departed from the southern Shanxi city of Houma on May 24 and was scheduled to arrive in the Central Asian country of Uzbekistan 15 days later.

The train is traveling along one of the China-Europe freight train routes, which departs from Chinese territory at the land port of Khorgos in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and goes all the way through Central Asia to Europe.

According to executives at Fanglue Bonded Logistics Center, the operator of the freight train service in Houma, this marked the 46th cargo train bound for Central Asia or Europe from Shanxi province this year.

Shanxi, which has positioned itself as a new hub for opening-up in inland China, has developed the China-Europe freight train service since 2017. There are 10 routes for the service, departing Chinese territory via such land ports as Manzhouli and Ereenhot in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and Alataw and Khorgos in Xinjiang.

To date, Shanxi has seen the departure of 683 cargo trains to 33 cities in Central Asian and European countries. The freight train service has played an important role in facilitating Shanxi's trade with countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, according to local officials.

A freight train bound for Central Asia departs from Houma city on May 24. ZHANG YI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanxi's freight train service toward Laos and the rest of Southeast Asia also started in March 2022. The bonded land port in Houma is the starting point of the route.

The international train services have made Shanxi a hub for opening-up in inland China and greatly contributed to promoting international business cooperation, local officials and industry insiders said. They added that developing international logistics passageways through China's cross-border railway facilities can push the boundaries of the inland province to do international trade.

Shanxi has developed a number of land ports and logistics parks to serve international freight trains. These include Zhongding in Jinzhong and Fanglue in Houma, as well as others in the cities of Datong, Yangquan, Jiexiu and Xiaoyi.

Zhang Yi contributed to this story.

ADVERTORIAL

WORLD

Green route mooted for development

Promotion of digital infrastructure way forward for growth, Macao forum told

By XU WEIWEI in Macao
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While infrastructure development has brought huge benefits to most parts of the world, it has also faced new challenges such as climate change, and the way forward to sustainable development with high-quality Belt and Road Initiative is to promote digital, green infrastructure, experts said at a Macao forum on Thursday.

With the theme, "Green Leadership, Digital Intelligence, Financial Empowerment, Win-Win Cooperation", the two-day 14th International Infrastructure Investment and Construction Forum, or IIICF, opened in Macao.

Guo Tingting, China's vice-minister of commerce, said in the past 10 years the BRI has made a huge contribution to infrastructure development and connectivity. Digital development is adding new impetus to international infrastructure investment while facing new challenges.

"We have signed memorandums of understanding with relevant departments of different countries to strengthen international investment cooperation, especially with the developing countries, to achieve the inclusive development of digital infrastructure," she said.

Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister Sainbuyan Amarsaikhan said within the framework of the "Vision 2050" long-term development policy adopted by the State Great Khural (Parliament) in 2020, Mongolia pursues socioeconomic and human developments, with measures to upgrade the readiness of information and communication technology and capacity of its infrastructure.

Mike Elton Mposha, Zambia's minister of water development and sanitation, noted Zambia's intention to foster economic growth and development while safeguarding natural assets in order to continue to provide resources and environmental sustainability.

Within the context of sustainable development goals and national vision 2030, Zambia employs strategies that ensure that natural assets can deliver their full economic potential on a sustainable basis, he said.

Ding Yanzhang, chairman of the Power Construction Corporation of China (PowerChina), said digital transformation is one of the core strategies of PowerChina's development.

Dai Hegen, chairman of the board of the China National Chemical Engineering Group, said that promoting green and low-carbon economic and social development is key to achieving high-quality development.

Lou Qiliang, president of CRRC Corporation Limited, said they have carefully planned and promoted digital transformation and business model innovation to help promote the high-quality development of global rail transit.

Emission risks

Jonathan Muga, global head of the infrastructure sector, client coverage at Standard Bank Group in South Africa, said that infrastructure carries risks of emissions, local environmental and social impacts and as long-lived assets, infrastructure is particularly impacted by the effects of climate change. "So we partner with our clients to encourage the adoption of socially and environmentally sustainable practices in infrastructure."

Rohan Sinanan, minister of works and transport, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, said the republic is progressing toward achieving economic, social, and environmental transformation guided by its Vision 2030, a comprehensive national development strategy.

The fruitful partnership between the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and China "has played a pivotal role in successfully implementing crucial projects thus far while promoting cooperation in sustainable development", Sinanan said.

Alessandro Golombiewski Teixeira, a professor at the School of Public Policy & Management of Tsinghua University, said in recent years, Latin America's cooperation in infrastructure has grown exponentially. "We must also focus on paving the path toward a more sustainable and digitally advanced future," he said.

The forum also saw two BRI reports released: the Report on the Belt and Road Infrastructure Development Index (2023) and the first-ever Report on Portuguese-speaking Countries' Infrastructure Development Index and Macao's Achievements in Belt and Road Initiative (2023).

Florence Li in Macao contributed to this story.

Taking flight

A parrot breeder and a parrot are seen at the Shah Alam Stadium in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Tuesday. Parrot breeders and caretakers in Selangor showcased a "free flight" performance with different species of parrots ahead of the World Parrot Day, which was on Wednesday. SYAIFUL REDZUAN / GETTY IMAGES

Growing-up lessons

Chinese and Kenyan children and their parents plant a tree in a Chinese school in Nairobi to celebrate International Children's Day on Thursday. Organized by the Kenyan Chinese Youth Association and Erdemann Chinese School, the tree planting was followed by a games event for parents and children, in which more than 60 families took part. The day also saw Kenya celebrating the 60th Madaraka Day, the day the country gained independence from the United Kingdom. XIE SONGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Germany shuts Russian consulates

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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Relations between Russia and Germany hit a new low on Wednesday when Berlin ordered the closure of four Russian consulates in the country to retaliate against Moscow's move to limit the number of German officials working in Russia.

Russia slammed Germany's decision as "ill-thought-out provocative actions" and vowed to respond.

"There should be no doubt in Berlin that these ill-thought-out provocative actions will not remain without our proper reaction," the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The tit-for-tat move came after Russia set a limit for the number of staff at the German embassy and related bodies in Russia at 350. Those include Germans working in cultural and educational entities such as the Goethe Institute.

German Foreign Ministry spokesman Christofer Burger said the measure was intended to create a "parity of personnel and structures" between the two countries.

He said Russia would be allowed to continue operating the embassy in Berlin and one consulate in another city after the end of the year. Russia has five consulates in Bonn, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Leipzig and Munich.

Burger said the Russian decision earlier means that Germany would have to close its consulates in Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk and Kaliningrad by November. Only the German embassy in Moscow and the consulate in St. Petersburg would remain open.

Regrettable move

He said that Germany's counterstroke move was regrettable but the Russia-Ukraine conflict meant there was "simply no basis" for numerous bilateral activities anymore.

He added that Germany's decision to concentrate its remaining staff in the embassy and a key consulate would "preserve the diplomatic presence in Russia".

In April, Moscow expelled 40 German diplomats to retaliate Berlin's decision to expel 40 Russian diplomats. The two countries had deep economic and cultural links before the Russia-Ukraine conflict started in February 2022.

In the United States, President Joe Biden approved a new package of military aid for Ukraine that totals up to $300 million and includes additional munitions for drones and an array of other weapons. It comes as Russia has continued to strike Ukraine's capital and unmanned aircraft have targeted Moscow.

US officials have said there is no suggestion that US-made drones or munitions were used in the Moscow strikes, which the Kremlin blamed on Ukraine but Kyiv has not acknowledged.

The new aid package provides munitions to boost Ukraine's air defense capabilities to fend off Russia's airstrikes on Kyiv. It provides munitions for Patriot missile batteries and High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, as well as Avenger and Stinger air defense systems.

In another development, the governor of Russia's Belgorod region said on Thursday that Ukrainian forces had shelled the border town of Shebekino, setting one residential building in the town ablaze. Vyacheslav Gladkov said the attacks had also damaged the local administration building and injured a resident.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Briefly

DPRK

Washington remarks on satellite launch slammed

Kim Yo-jong, vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, on Thursday accused the United States of hypocrisy for criticizing the country's failed launch of a military satellite and insisted a successful launch will be made soon. Kim Yo-jong said Pyongyang's efforts to acquire space-based reconnaissance capabilities were a legitimate exercise of its sovereign right and restated the country's rejection of UN Security Council resolutions that ban it from conducting any launch involving ballistic missile technology.

UNITED KINGDOM

Johnson hands info to govt amid probe

Former prime minister Boris Johnson urged the UK government on Wednesday to share unredacted WhatsApp messages and notebooks with an inquiry probing the handling of the pandemic, after it threatened legal action to obtain them. The move follows the chair of the public inquiry setting a Thursday afternoon deadline for the trove to be handed over by the Cabinet Office, which has been resisting claiming it includes "unambiguously irrelevant" material. The ministry, which coordinates government activity, has insisted the redacted parts are "beyond the scope of this investigation". But a spokesman for Johnson insisted the ex-leader is "perfectly happy" to share the contentious documents.

UNITED STATES

Mike Pence to launch presidential campaign

Former vice-president Mike Pence will officially launch his long-expected campaign for the Republican nomination for president in Iowa next week, adding another candidate to the growing GOP field and putting him in direct competition with his former boss. Pence will hold a kickoff event in Des Moines on June 7, the date of his 64th birthday, according to two people familiar with his plans who spoke on condition of anonymity while sharing details ahead of the official announcement. The decision to begin his campaign in Iowa instead of his home state of Indiana underscores the importance Pence's team is placing on the early-voting state.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Canada to acknowledge injustice against Chinese

By RENA LI in Toronto
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Canada has designated the Exclusion of Chinese Immigrants as an event of national historic significance.

"The designation of the Exclusion of Chinese Immigrants as a national historic event, 100 years since its enactment, acknowledges the tragic injustice that Chinese Canadians suffered while also offering an opportunity to reflect on the importance of combating anti-Asian racism," said Steven Guilbeault, minister of environment and climate change and minister responsible for Parks Canada.

The designation on Tuesday means there is now an official memorialization of the grave historical injustice of the Chinese Exclusion Act, acknowledging its xenophobia, human rights violation, racial discrimination and systemic racism.

It hampered the development and engagement of the Chinese community and had an adverse impact on generations of Chinese families, according to Lloyd Wong, an associate professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Calgary.

"Our hope is that this memorialization will serve as a call for all Canadians and key institutions in Canada to strengthen educational efforts which recognize the long-term impacts of this exclusionary legislation and to be aware and to combat contemporary anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism in Canada while never forgetting the past," said Teresa Woo-Paw, chair of the Action, Chinese Canadians Together Foundation.

The 1923 legislation replaced the first Chinese Immigration Act, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, of 1885, which included various head taxes (entry taxes) among other measures to deter immigration from China.

After the act was repealed in 1947, Chinese immigration was placed under the jurisdiction of the Immigration Act in the category of Asian immigration more broadly. Asian immigration was limited to spouses and unmarried children aged 18 or younger of men already living in Canada.

In 1955, the age restriction for dependents was increased to 25. In 1967, overt racial restrictions were removed, and the Immigration Act has continued to evolve.

Official apology

In 2006, after two decades of lobbying, Chinese Canadians received an official apology from the federal government for the head taxes and the exclusion of Chinese immigrants.

Mary Ng, Canada minister of small business, export promotion and international trade, said the Exclusion Act not only prevented Chinese immigrants from coming to Canada, but also reinforced the negative stereotypes and prejudice against Chinese Canadians.

"We contribute to every aspect of Canadian life, from business to arts and culture to sports and science to teachers, to front-line healthcare workers, to farmers, to professionals, and of course to political life," Ng said at an event commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act in Toronto.

"I'm happy to say that now we have eight Chinese-descent Members of Parliament in Canada across all parties, and we serve Canadians in different parts of the country," Ng said. "So, all of us together make an incredibly strong voice."

Canada senators Victor Oh and Yuen Pau Woo, in partnership with the Action, Chinese Canadians Together Foundation, will host a National Remembrance Ceremony on June 23 to mark the 100th anniversary of the introduction of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Sudan's cease-fire talks suffer setback

KHARTOUM — Sudan's military suspended its participation in talks with the paramilitary force it's been battling for weeks for control of the northeastern African country, a military spokesman said on Wednesday.

The development was a blow to the international mediation efforts.

Brigadier Nabil Abdalla, a spokesman for the Sudanese armed forces, told The Associated Press that the move is a protest against the Rapid Support Forces' "repeated violations" of the humanitarian cease-fire, including their continued occupation of hospitals and other infrastructure in the capital, Khartoum.

The negotiations with the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, which began in early May, had produced a declaration of commitments to protect civilians and two short-term truce agreements.

Sudan descended into chaos after fighting erupted in mid-April between the military and the RSF. The fighting has killed at least 866 civilians and wounded thousands more, according to the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate.

Abdalla, the spokesman, said the military wants to ensure the terms of a US-Saudi-brokered truce "be fully implemented" before discussing further steps. He did not elaborate.

Responding to the military's move, the RSF said it "unconditionally backs the Saudi-US initiative".

Two other senior military officials said the army sent a letter to the Saudi and US mediators detailing what they called the RSF violations. They said the military delegation was still at the venue of the talks in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday that both sides in the conflict had violated their commitments to a cease-fire and warned that Washington was looking at what steps it could take to make its views clear.

More than 1.2 million people were displaced from their homes, UN humanitarian officials said on Wednesday.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said the International Organization for Migration based its tally on preliminary reports from field teams, while figures on additional displaced are likely to emerge as humanitarian access improves.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Vendors sell fish at a market in Khartoum, Sudan, on Wednesday amid continued fighting between the two rival factions. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo is underway at the Pazhou International Convention and Exhibition Center in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Expo provides platform for greater global cooperation

Province's opening-up further stimulated by event's ongoing success

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo 2023 opens in Guangzhou, South China's Guangdong province, on Friday. Welcoming delegations from 57 countries and regions, it will boost imports and further opening up the province to the world.

Launched in 2014, the expo has gradually become an essential platform for cooperation between Guangdong and the countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, according to the expo's organizing committee.

"The event has been promoting policy communication, facility connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration, and people-to-people connections with BRI countries and regions," said Chen Yuehua, deputy secretary-general of the secretariat of the organizing committee, at a news conference in late May. He is also a senior official with the Department of Commerce of Guangdong, one of the organizers of the expo.

Three countries — Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Cote d'Ivoire — have set up national image exhibition areas for the first time at the expo.

The 57 participating countries and regions are distributed across five continents, and they include all 15 members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

The 2023 MSRE continues to follow the patterns of "one exhibition plus one conference" and "comprehensive exhibitions plus trade shows", according to its organizing committee.

The exhibition, covering an area of 50,000 square meters, is being held at the China Import and Export Fair Complex till Sunday. It features three comprehensive exhibition areas for international cooperation and exchanges, international high-quality brands and foreign trade bases, as well as a professional exhibition area for Silk Road e-commerce.

The conference was held on Thursday at the Guangzhou Yuexiu International Congress Center, featuring one themed forum, five parallel subforums and two supplementary activities.

Trade opportunities

With an expanding circle of friends from overseas, the 2023 MSRE showcases thousands of domestic and foreign brands brought by 1,000 exhibitors, covering popular consumer categories such as food and beverages, trendy beauty and makeup, personal care and household products and appliances.

Visitors watch a band perform during the Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo held in 2021.

Participants from home and abroad attend the Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo in 2021.

"We are providing 'one-stop' comprehensive services for exhibitors and buyers, promoting market supply and demand matching and resource coupling between China and BRI countries and regions, helping enterprises create more business opportunities, and sharing new opportunities for China's development," said Luo Zheng, deputy director-general of the Guangzhou commerce bureau, one of the expo's co-organizers.

Besides brands familiar to Chinese consumers, such as French brand Guerlain and Japanese electronics brand Citizen, new brands are appearing at the expo as well, including European floral and fruit tea brand Teekanne and Malaysian mineral water brand Spritzer.

The organizing committee is initiating the first Maritime Silk Road International Consumer Festival during the fair, giving better exposure of the imported products to Chinese consumers and buyers.

Hundreds of professional buyers including Taobao, Eternal Asia, Guangzhou Grandbuy, Watsons and China Duty Free Group have attended the expo for procurement at the invitation of the organizing committee, together with many industrial associations.

According to Luo, the expo appeals to Chinese foreign trade bases too which see it as a valuable channel to connect with foreign markets.

Dozens of foreign trade bases in Guangdong are seeking opportunities at the fair, including those which specialize in motorcycles and parts from Guangzhou, electronics from Dongguan, furniture from Shunde of Foshan, leisure clothing from the Shaxi town of Zhongshan and household appliances from Zhuhai.

"We will organize online global livestreaming during the expo to link up with overseas buyers for online exhibition viewing and precise business matching," said Chen, adding that it will be an effective way for these foreign trade bases to obtain overseas orders.

Diversified activities

With the aim of creating an enabling environment for international cooperation, the themed forum of the 2023 MSRE, which was held on Thursday, served as a platform for participants to share best practices, explore new opportunities for collaboration, and ultimately promote the BRI.

With the theme of Exploring New Opportunities for International Cooperation and Jointly Building a High-Quality Silk Road, the main forum saw participants engaging in discussions and exchanges centered around scientific and technological innovation cooperation, and biotech health cooperation with BRI countries and regions, as well as promoting the deep participation of RCEP member countries in the construction of the BRI.

Parallel subforums at the event include the Belt and Road Regional Cooperation Forum, Belt and Road Academician Forum, and Health Silk Road International Cooperation Forum.

Besides the forums, the expo's organizing committee will stage more than 20 promotional events and cultural exchange activities such as cultural performances, as well as more than 30 cross-border matchmaking events.

During the expo, the Belt and Road International Youth Leaders Forum will be held for the first time, providing a platform for communication and cooperation among young leaders of countries and regions involved in the BRI.

Young leaders from multiple countries and regions, such as France, the UK and Portugal, will be present at the forum, according to the organizing committee.

A foreign visitor inquires about wine products at an exhibition booth at the Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo in 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Silk Road-themed fair receives high praise

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The Guangdong 21st Century Maritime Silk Road International Expo, or MSRE, has earned a well-deserved reputation as a crucial platform for facilitating international trade cooperation among countries and regions and helping businesses expand their overseas markets.

This year's edition is being held in Guangzhou of Guangdong province from Friday to Sunday, with an exhibition area of 50,000 square meters.

More than 1,000 exhibitors from around the world are participating, including those from other Asian countries and regions, Africa, Europe and Oceania.

"MSRE is one of the most important platforms for Malaysia to further enhance our export promotion, not only to China but to the whole world," said Haris Latiff, trade consul at the Consulate General of Malaysia in Guangzhou. "It is one of the iconic annual events in which Malaysian companies participate."

This year, there are 18 Malaysian businesses participating in the expo, showcasing products that range from food and beverages to rubber and oil.

"The expo provides Malaysian exhibitors with a platform to promote their products to a wider range of trade visitors. It doubles the opportunities to reach out to buyers and assists in creating a wider customer database," Latiff said. "I am confident that Malaysian companies will perform well at the MSRE."

With a focus on promoting peace, cooperation and opening-up, as well as fostering inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit, the expo continues to be a key platform for facilitating trade cooperation among countries and regions in the Belt and Road Initiative since its debut in 2014.

"This event has evolved over the years in tandem with the milestones of bilateral trade relations between Malaysia and China," Latiff said, adding that with its strong commitment to a shared future in the BRI, a new era of extensive cooperation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and China is emerging.

"Malaysia fully supports this, and we believe that we will build a common homeland that values peace, prosperity and friendship, and write a new chapter of a higher-level regional cooperation through open regionalism," said Latiff.

Hungary, another participating country, has set up a 36-sq-m area in the expo's country pavilion and 9 sq m at the company exhibition area.

"As the first-time participant in the expo, we are eager to share the best of Hungary with the world," said Renato Horvath, commercial consul at the Consulate General of Hungary in Guangzhou.

At the ongoing expo, Hungary is bringing a selection of its renowned wines that embody ancient winemaking traditions and innovative practices.

"Through the expo, we hope to reach wine connoisseurs, industry professionals and enthusiasts alike, helping them explore the diverse range of our wines," Horvath said.

The Shunde Furniture Association from Foshan, which is participating in the expo for the first time, has gathered 11 representative businesses from its membership.

"Shunde's furniture occupies a relatively large market share in Europe and the United States as its products are positioned as high-level goods," said Niu Xirui, secretary-general of the association. "However, these markets have experienced sluggishness due to the pandemic, which prompts businesses to seek new opportunities for growth. This exhibition focusing on the BRI has brought us more platforms and channels to expand our high-end purchases."

During the expo, the 11 businesses are showcasing products ranging from sofas, bar stools and office chairs to conference tables.

Niu said the exhibits fully represent the comprehensive furniture industry cluster in Shunde's furniture base, boasting abundant product categories and a favorable industrial foundation.

"We hope to demonstrate the brand image and strength of our Shunde furniture industry cluster and promote our regional brand by participating in this national platform," Niu added.

Onion Global, a platform for brand management, is another first-time exhibitor at the expo, bringing its signature lines of Tenkou Ryuugi, which features Japanese hot-selling products such as household items and cosmetics, and Qianshi Zhennong, which focuses on agricultural products.

"The expo brings together high-quality international commodities, which align with Onion's concept of global sourcing and sales through a one-stop-shop approach," said Pan Jianyue, chief marketing officer of Onion Global.

"Through this event, we can better understand consumer trends and market demand, strive for excellence, and create better lifestyles for people. We also hope to have more communication and exchange with BRI countries and regions to promote cultural learning and mutual understanding," Pan said.

Guangzhou playing key role in BRI construction

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Guangzhou, a port city of South China's Guangdong province, has been a proactive contributor to the Belt and Road Initiative for the past decade.

Since 2015, the city has efficiently carried out three-year action plans to do its bit for the initiative.

"The city has successively implemented three rounds of three-year action plans, promoting policy communication, infrastructure construction and connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration and people-to-people exchanges with BRI countries and regions," said Hong Qian, head of the Guangzhou commerce bureau.

According to the bureau, Guangzhou has established friendships with 68 cities in 52 BRI countries and regions, and its Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation, which serves as a platform for global participants to learn about and share their best practices on sustainable development, has attracted 205 BRI cities.

By leveraging its transportation network, the city has also facilitated infrastructure construction. The route network of Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport currently connects to 208 destinations globally, including 51 international and regional passenger routes. This has created a four-hour aviation traffic circle linking major domestic and Southeast Asian cities and a 12-hour aviation traffic circle connecting major cities worldwide.

A researcher conducts an experiment at the China-Singapore International Joint Research Institute in Guangzhou.
LI JIANFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Over the past 10 years, the airport's cumulative passenger throughput has reached approximately 541.53 million, while the cumulative cargo and mail throughput has reached approximately 17.26 million metric tons.

Since 2013, the number of container shipping routes at Guangzhou Port has increased from 81 to 202 — a growth rate of 149.4 percent — while the number of BRI shipping routes has increased from 39 to 129, a growth rate of 230.8 percent.

Since being launched in 2016, the city's China-Europe freight train services have connected more than 30 cities in over 20 countries and regions in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, West Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia. In 2022, the number of the rail freight operations hit 656, up 2.4 times year-on-year.

Last year, Guangzhou was approved by the State Council to carry out a comprehensive pilot program for expanding the service industry's opening-up.

Official data showed, paid-in investment from 64 BRI countries and regions in Guangzhou achieved $210 million in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 6.2 percent. Between 2013 and 2022, a total of 4,812 businesses from those 64 countries and regions invested in Guangzhou, with contracted foreign investment totaling $5.09 billion and paid-in foreign investment of $2.48 billion.

The city has also achieved remarkable success with cultural exchanges, hosting events and mobilizing resources. For example, its branded Maritime Silk Road cultural activities have been held in 20 BRI countries and regions, and the Alliance of Guangzhou International Friendship City Universities has developed 19 member universities from around the world, covering 17 major cities.

As this year marks the 10th anniversary of Guangzhou's participation in the BRI, the city will continue to implement high-quality work to make new contributions to BRI construction, said Hong. These efforts will include piloting innovation in trade and services, promoting higher-level opening-up and securing the investment and benefits of local businesses in their overseas development.

Guangzhou has not only finalized the previous stage of work but is mapping out the next three-year action plan for participating in the BRI constriction, Hong added.

May plant output up, snapping recent lull

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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An employee welds equipment at a plant in Luoyang, Henan province. HUANG ZHENGWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

China's factory activity in May expanded for the first time in three months, driven by an upturn in production and other factors, a private survey showed on Thursday.

Meanwhile, as manufacturers in China still face pressure and difficulties such as weak demand, a more challenging external environment and slumping profits, there is a need for more policy stimulus measures to boost domestic demand and stronger support for smaller businesses, analysts said.

The Caixin China General Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index — which gauges operating conditions in the sector — rose from 49.5 in April to 50.9 in May, showing signs of improvement in the area, media group Caixin said on Thursday.

A PMI reading above 50 signifies expansion, while one below 50 signals contraction.

Wang Zhe, a senior economist at Caixin Insight Group, said the manufacturing PMI returned to expansionary territory as both supply and demand improved in May.

The Caixin report showed that the subindex for manufacturing output grew significantly in May, logging the highest level since June 2022. The gauge for total new orders recorded the second-highest reading since May 2021 as surveyed businesses reported more clients and demand.

Caixin said external demand remained stable in May, with the subindex for new export orders rising marginally.

Referring to the 12-month outlook for output, manufacturers polled by Caixin remained optimistic. However, business confidence for the coming 12 months slipped to a seven-month low in May, though it remained above 50.

Meanwhile, firms maintained a cautious approach to hiring, with the subindex for employment shrinking in May at the fastest rate since February 2020.

Despite the improvement in China's factory activity, Wang said China's manufacturing sector experienced a patchy recovery.

"The divergence points to the fact that current economic growth lacks internal drivers and that market entities lack sufficient confidence, highlighting the importance of expanding and restoring demand," Wang added. "Currently, stabilizing employment, increasing incomes and bolstering expectations through a proactive fiscal policy should be prioritized given the dire job market and mounting deflationary pressure."

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Wednesday offer the latest official snapshot of the rising pressures facing the economy, as the official PMI for China's manufacturing sector fell to 48.8 in May from 49.2 in April.

The country's official composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and nonmanufacturing activity, came in at 52.9 in May compared with 54.4 in April, the NBS said.

Zhao Qinghe, a senior NBS statistician, said Chinese businesses came under pressure in May, and more efforts should be made to consolidate the foundation for economic recovery.

While China is on track for recovering with improvement in some key economic indicators like consumption, insufficient demand remains the key problem facing the continued recovery trend as well as the operation of enterprises, said Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

Wang called for enhancing support to spur consumption and boost consumer confidence.

Notably, Wang mentioned that private firms, which are mainly small firms, play a key role in providing most urban employment in China, and more efforts should be made to increase support for hard-hit enterprises, including further easing burdens for micro and small businesses and boosting financial support.

Wang's views were echoed by Li Xiaochao, former deputy head of the NBS, who highlighted the necessity for near-term policies to strengthen consumption and avoid the risk of a downward spiral.

Li said it is advisable for the government to step up macroeconomic policy support to shore up growth, including monetary policy easing.

Beijing points to importance of US biz ties

Commerce chiefs meet in Washington to smoothen bilateral trade relationship

By ZHONG NAN
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China and the United States agreed to continue to strengthen their communication channels and engage in discussions to identify potential areas of cooperation, said the Ministry of Commerce on Thursday.

The ministry issued the statement after Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao met with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in Washington and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai in Detroit during the 29th APEC Trade Ministers' Meeting in late May.

The US CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, semiconductor industry policies and export controls are the main economic and trade concerns for the Chinese side, and these issues were raised by Wang during his talks with the US side, said Shu Jueting, a spokeswoman for the ministry.

The US CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 prohibits companies from expanding their advanced semiconductor manufacturing in China for 10 years after they receive subsidies to build US plants.

During the talks, the two sides had in-depth exchanges on these topics and agreed to continue discussions in the future, Shu said at a weekly news conference in Beijing.

She said both sides recognize the significance of the Sino-US economic and trade relationship. They exchanged views on their respective concerns regarding economic and trade issues and explored potential areas of cooperation.

China and the US should work together to effectively manage their differences and jointly uphold and deepen pragmatic economic and trade cooperation between the two countries, said Shu, stressing that the cooperation will benefit both countries and their people, as well as promote global economic growth.

At a summit organized by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Beijing last week, Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council, said that his organization looks forward to advancing the healthy growth of China-US business ties through constructive dialogue and engagement in the coming years.

All related parties should work together to ensure the two countries pursue a path that does not allow the competitive concerns between them to outweigh the benefits of cooperation, said Allen.

Michael Hart, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said there will be abundant opportunities for collaboration, in particular in the fields of agriculture, aviation, healthcare and automotive, in the years ahead. It is also no surprise that US companies in the consumer sector are still expanding in China, given the size of its market.

"During our meeting with the National Development and Reform Commission, we were heartened to hear that there continues to be a valued role for US companies to contribute to the development of the Chinese economy," said Hart. "Many of our member companies were interested to learn more about specific new opportunities for participation, whether in green energy or electric vehicles."

Upbeat about the Chinese market, US carmaker Tesla announced in April that it will build a new factory in Shanghai to manufacture its energy-storage product Megapack.

Supported by its continued investment in product innovation, digitization and supply chains in China, US chain Starbucks Coffee Co also announced earlier this week that it plans to have up to 9,000 store across the country by 2025.

Minister Wang also attended the ministerial meeting of China and members of the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement in Detroit last week, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Wang highlighted China's strong commitment to joining DEPA. Since the establishment of its DEPA working group, the Chinese government has collaborated effectively with member countries, achieving notable progress.

Currently, multiple regions within China are proactively engaging with DEPA and are exploring cooperation in various fields. Some projects have made positive progress. China looks forward to enhancing practical cooperation with DEPA members while advancing accession negotiations, with the aim of facilitating the early implementation of more projects, he added.

HIGHER GROUND

June 18 gala off to roaring start for nation's retailers

By FAN FEIFEI
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An advertisement for the June 18 shopping carnival seen on a street in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese consumers' passion for online purchases has been sparked again with this year's June 18 shopping carnival, which more resembles a shopping month, as related online purchases kicked off at 8 pm on Wednesday, with major e-commerce platforms accelerating efforts to offer steep discounts and shopping coupons and use livestreaming promotions to boost sales.

Industry experts said the midyear online shopping extravaganza plays a vital role in stimulating consumers' purchasing appetites, promoting the recovery of consumption and shoring up the economy amid downward pressure and external uncertainties.

E-commerce giant JD, which initially created the June 18 campaign, said the number of brands that witnessed sales revenue surpass 100 million yuan ($14.0 million) within the first 10 minutes surged 23 percent year-on-year, while the transaction volume of nearly 50 percent of small- and medium-sized enterprises skyrocketed more than 200 percent on a yearly basis.

The turnover of Apple's products on JD surpassed 100 million yuan in just one second, while sales of smartphones from Xiaomi, Honor, Oppo and Vivo increased more than 100 percent year-on-year within the first 10 minutes. In addition, the transaction volume of JD's cross-border platform JD Worldwide in just five minutes exceeded total sales of the first two hours from last year.

Xin Lijun, CEO of JD retail — the retail unit of JD — said the company has issued more discounts and vouchers for the June 18 shopping festival compared with previous years. "We will launch more products and provide easier and more convenient shopping experiences for consumers."

Meanwhile, Apple hosted its first livestreaming event at its official flagship store on Alibaba Group's Tmall at 7 pm on Wednesday, as the US tech company steps up its push to offer substantial discounts on its main products including smartphones and smartwatches to drum up sales in the Chinese market.

Online discounter Pinduoduo has kicked off its June 18 promotional event, vowing to distribute shopping coupons worth 5 billion yuan covering a wide range of categories such as smartphones, home appliances, cosmetics, fresh products, maternal and infant goods as well as apparel.

The midyear promotion gala has further stimulated consumers' purchasing appetites and boosted the recovery of the economy, said Wang Yun, a researcher at the Academy of Macroeconomic Research, which is affiliated with the National Development and Reform Commission.

Wang expects China's consumer sector to maintain growth momentum in the second quarter, with the overall growth rate reaching more than 6 percent in 2023, adding that more efforts should be made to stabilize employment and improve household incomes.

As livestreaming becomes the new normal for retail practices in China, this year's June 18 event is set to be a grand platform where business executives and online influencers attract customers through targeted narratives for brands and products, said Mo Daiqing, a senior analyst at domestic consultancy Internet Economy Institute.

Mo said that following previous seasons of glitzy strategies, companies are taking a more pragmatic approach this time, offering an array of coupons and discounts to customers, with the promotional events becoming simpler.

Luxury watchmaker says sales picking up 'nicely'

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Jaeger-LeCoultre's sales growth in China has been steady this year after the country optimized its COVID-19 measures, the Swiss luxury watch brand said, with an upswing in business performance, especially during key festivals, fueling its continued investments in the country.

Catherine Renier

Jaeger-LeCoultre said Generation Z, or those born in the mid- and late-1990s and into the 2000s, has become an important consumer group in China.

Young Chinese, besides using digital watches as a tool, tend to buy traditional timepieces to express their emotions and slow the pace of time, even as they keep abreast of the latest technology, the Swiss brand said.

The company said sales performance was positive in China this year, especially during the Chinese Lunar New Year, and May 20 (a date that sounds like "I love you" in Chinese) as well as other festive occasions.

China is one of its top five markets globally in terms of size.

Both men and women have bought its products equally, and that is something the company cherishes, it said.

"China is a very important market and we have invested a lot, and it is giving us a great response. It has been a bigger focus for us and we will continue to invest. Last year was an up-and-down year, but we have come back to normal and the business has picked up nicely," said Catherine Renier, CEO of Jaeger-LeCoultre.

"I'm very confident in our industry as a whole, and we will continue to invest in innovation and new products in China. It's going to be a busy year," she said.

By 2025, China will become the world's largest luxury goods market and Chinese consumers are likely to make up nearly half of global spending in the sector, a report by consultancy Bain & Co showed.

Jaeger-LeCoultre said upgrading the physical store experience has been its focus. It opened its flagship store in Shanghai last year, and organized some immersive activities, such as watchmaking classes.

The company plans to engage more consumers in a number of Chinese cities, and is currently launching a campaign in Chengdu, Sichuan province in Southwest China.

Yet, its primary goal is not only expansion, but also upgrading customer experiences, the Swiss watchmaker said.

During the pandemic, the company further developed its online business, such as increasing video engagement, and invested heavily on its website, but online sales have been a relatively small part of its operations.

The company is also marketing more through social media platforms to target young consumers.

Meanwhile, Jaeger-LeCoultre is celebrating its 12th year of partnership with the Shanghai International Film Festival, which will be held between June 9 and June 17.

The Jaeger-LeCoultre Glory to the Filmmaker Award at the festival honors filmmakers for their cinematic achievements.

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank continued to inject funds into the financial system through open market operations on Thursday. The People's Bank of China said it has conducted 2 billion yuan ($281.83 million) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 2 percent. The move is aimed at keeping liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the central bank said.

Construction begins at tire factory project

Cooper Tire & Rubber Co, a subsidiary of US tire giant Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co, on Wednesday started construction of the second phase of its factory in Kunshan in East China's Jiangsu province. Once completed, the new project, valued at $200 million, is expected to produce 2.6 million radial tires for passenger vehicles every year. This will bring the total annual output value of Cooper's Kunshan company to over 2 billion yuan. A high-standard green workshop will be built to produce tires entirely made of recyclable materials, which is expected to help Cooper slash the emission of greenhouse gases.

Waterway freight volume up

China's waterways cargo transport expanded steadily in April, with total freight volume jumping 12.4 percent year-on-year, official data showed. A total of 780 million metric tons of cargo were transported through waterways in the country last month, according to the Ministry of Transport. During the first four months of the year, China's waterways handled 2.82 billion tons of cargo, up 7.3 percent from the same period last year.

Courier sector handles more parcels

As of May 31, China's courier sector saw its delivery volume exceed 50 billion parcels so far this year, mirroring the country's economic vitality, according to the State Post Bureau. The milestone was achieved 155 days earlier than in 2019, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The figure was also achieved 27 days earlier than in 2022, data from the SPB showed.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Visitors check out Schneider Electric's products during the fifth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Schneider Electric to further tap China's green opportunities

French company plans more resources to support nation's high-quality growth

By ZHONG NAN
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With China entering a new era of green and innovation-led growth, Schneider Electric SE, a French multinational company specializing in energy management, will allocate more resources to growing electrification and digitalization-related businesses in China given the country's all-round progress toward high-quality development, said a senior executive.

China's focus on digitalization and sustainability with an economic return is complementary to Schneider Electric's growth strategy, said Chris Leong, chief marketing officer and member of the group's executive committee.

With Schneider Electric's expertise in energy management and automation, its "electrification plus digitalization equals sustainability" formula and solutions can contribute greatly to China's industry upgrade and dual carbon goals — reaching a carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, said Leong.

She said the formula is applied in various industries around the world and has proven to be the right path. One example is the research and development facility employing 5,000 workers that Schneider Electric opened in Grenoble, France last year.

The facility, called IntenCity, is fully equipped with Schneider Electric's technologies and solutions covering planning, building, operation and maintenance. It consumes 37 kilowatt-hours per square meter each year, nearly 90 percent less than the average building in Europe, using rooftop solar panels, on-site wind turbines and digital applications to generate, manage, share and coordinate energy with its community micro-grid.

The company has also assisted the industrial park in the Lingang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone in achieving active energy management, access to renewable energy and improved operational efficiency with lower carbon emissions.

Supported by advanced solutions, the park is able to cut 60 percent of its monthly energy costs and expects to save 1.1 million kWh of electricity annually, accelerating its transformation toward a green and low-carbon industrial park.

"By strategizing, decarbonizing and digitalizing, we believe that current technologies not only improve efficiency and save costs but also cut carbon emissions. This will generate profits for companies and benefit society at the same time," Leong said, adding that more customers are willing to pay for green products since Schneider Electric already uses technologies to help reduce carbon emissions by 30 percent to 90 percent across various industries, from manufacturing and building to data centers and grids.

As many users may be concerned about their return on investment, Leong said that the average investment payback period, based on Schneider Electric's experience, is around three to four years.

"When a company has already received a return on its investment, it can continue to save more energy costs, reduce carbon emissions and improve its sustainable operations, which can bring green value to users and society," she noted.

Operating in China for 36 years, Schneider Electric has grown from a joint venture factory to one with 22 factories, seven distribution centers and five research and development centers across the country, with a more than 90 percent local purchase rate. China has become the French company's second-largest market worldwide.

Highlighting China's massive market, sophisticated industrial system, strong supply chain competitiveness and improved business environment, Leong said the group will continue to increase its expenditure in the country to strengthen its "China Hub" which comprises talent, innovation, supply chains and an ecosystem.

For example, after opening an automation R&D center in Wuxi, Jiangsu province in March of this year, Schneider Electric currently operates five innovation centers with over 2,000 engineers across China, one of which focuses on software development to help the company maintain and reinforce its competitiveness.

Despite the cautious global attitude toward foreign direct investment, China is expected to become more attractive to foreign companies this year due to its wider opening-up policies and anticipated economic rebound, said Wei Jianguo, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

China's actual use of FDI grew by 2.2 percent year-on-year to 499.46 billion yuan ($70.2 billion) in the first four months of 2023, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

At-home services find traction among Gen Z

By ZHENG YIRAN
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Door-to-door (DTD) services have shifted from a luxury use pattern to a routine consumption mode in China.

The booming market economy and development of the internet have made goods affordable and services, such as DTD pet feeding, cooking and massage, readily available.

Consumers, especially the younger generation, are becoming increasingly open to ordering such services, which in turn is generating new business growth points.

According to a report from market research company Kantar Worldpanel, China's DTD services market surpassed 2 trillion yuan ($283 billion) in 2021, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 64 percent between 2016 and 2021.

"Door-to-door wardrobe organizing has experienced explosive growth since 2021. Between 2021 and 2023, the number of post-1995 consumers surged by nearly 20 percent, among which many have become our regular customers for whom we offer services every quarter," said Guo Xixi, a wardrobe organizer. "Young customers spend between 10,000 yuan and 50,000 yuan on organizing wardrobes every year.

"Two years ago, our core customers were those with higher salaries. Now, demand from the middle-income group has surged."

Zhang Xinyuan, secretary-general of Co-found think tank, said, "With the help of the internet and smart devices, various services are delivered straight to consumers, offering a better user experience."

DTD services are finding applications in food delivery, housekeeping and beauty salons, he said.

"With its popularization, it is also shifting from a consumption limited to higher-income groups to a common choice," he said.

Su Yuanyuan, a post-1995 employee in Beijing, said DTD services have brought great convenience and a sense of well-being to her life.

As an internet engineer who works from 9 am to 6 pm six days a week, spending two hours in a beauty salon was a luxury for Su, until she discovered that beauty salons had started offering door-to-door services.

Su now orders DTD facial care twice a month. Although she spends 30 percent more on this compared to a beauty salon, she has started to enjoy the services. Su also often makes use of DTD housekeeping and cooking services.

"I really benefit a lot from such services. In this fast-paced society, it is such a blessing for young people," Su said.

Such services are also creating new occupations. Data from Qichacha, a company information aggregator, showed that currently there are 14,500 enterprises providing DTD services, covering food delivery, housekeeping, laundry, manicures, massages, repair and fresh food.

The popularity of the sector, however, is offset by uneven service quality, lack of qualifications and inconsistent operational standards.

Meng Lilian, chief analyst at the Sichuan Tianfu Health Industry Research Institute, said: "Industry standards should be established to ensure service quality. Meanwhile, a whole-process supervision mechanism should be set up."

An Guangyong, an expert at the Professional Committee of Credit Management of China Mergers and Acquisitions Association, said: "Enterprises should pay attention to improving workers' professional literacy and skill level, and enhancing the professionalism and differentiation of services. They should also focus on labor care, to avoid vicious competition and labor exploitation caused by excessive competition."

Peach of an idea!

Farmers from Chuanjun Planting and Cultivation Family Farm in Yu'an district, Lu'an, Anhui province, prepare peaches for sale to other regions on Wednesday. The farm rents 960 *mu* (64 hectares) of land from some 200 local farmers to plant over 20 types of peach trees. East China's Anhui is utilizing all channels to enrich farmers' incomes in its drive for rural vitalization. FAN ZIHAO / CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

Appliance makers expand overseas footprint

Aiming higher globally, companies build factories, research centers abroad

By FAN FEIFEI
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Chinese home appliance makers are expanding their footprint in emerging overseas markets, such as Mexico, India and Vietnam.

They are also increasing investment in localized research and development amid intensified competition from rivals in the domestic market, industry experts said.

Enhancing global operational capacity will help Chinese manufacturing enterprises better utilize global resources.

The experts said it will also promote the upgrading of China's manufacturing sector, as the country places great emphasis on establishing a modern industrial system and strives to develop high-end manufacturing.

Meanwhile, trade frictions between China and the United States haven't shaken the former's position as the world's largest manufacturing hub. An increasing number of Chinese manufacturers are transitioning from exporting products to exporting industrial capacity, they added.

Chinese consumer electronics company TCL Technology Group Corp is speeding up steps to strengthen its capacity in global operations, with a key focus on three core business segments covering intelligent terminals, semiconductor displays and new energy photovoltaics.

"Our intelligent terminals unit has established production bases in Vietnam, Poland, Mexico, Brazil and India, and we will further improve localized production and operations," said Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of TCL.

"The plant owned by TCL China Star Optoelectronics Technology Co Ltd in India has started operations in semiconductor displays. We plan to strengthen our global layout in industrial chains, marketing and R&D."

TCL is expanding its presence in North America by boosting its production capacity in large televisions at its Mexico factory. In 2014, it bought Japanese electronics manufacturer Sanyo's TV assembly factory in Mexico for the final assembly of products to be sold in the North American market.

In addition, the company, based in Huizhou, Guangdong province, has established photovoltaic cell and module factories in Malaysia, the Philippines and Mexico through joint ventures. The company said it will also explore the possibility of further expanding in the photovoltaic industry in overseas markets.

Li said building global competitiveness has always been an important strategy for TCL. Manufacturers should shift from exporting products to exporting industrial capacity, thereby driving exports of domestic components, materials and equipment, he said.

The high-tech manufacturing sector has become an important driving force for China's high-quality development, Li said. It also highlights the significance of technological innovation and capital input in bolstering the development of high-tech manufacturing, he added.

"We should accelerate the building of global industrial chains, break down trade barriers and build and improve our operations systems in the global market," he said.

The company has set up 43 R&D centers and 32 manufacturing centers around the world, with operations in more than 160 countries and regions. International business has become TCL's biggest growth engine.

Retail sales of China's home appliance sector reached 708.1 billion yuan ($99.6 billion) in 2022, down 7.4 percent year-on-year, according to Beijing-based market consultancy All View Cloud, which specializes in home appliances.

Domestic TV sales stood at 36.34 million units nationwide last year, down 5.2 percent compared with 2021, while related sales revenue totaled 112.3 billion yuan, a fall of 12.9 percent year-on-year, AVC said.

Industry experts said establishing overseas branches or production centers will not only bring China's advanced manufacturing, R&D and management capabilities to local markets, but also create job opportunities for locals, boost brand awareness and enhance the competitiveness of Chinese enterprises on the global stage.

The traditional market for televisions is almost saturated and companies need to seek new growth points, said Dong Min, deputy secretary-general of the China Video Industry Association. Competition in the domestic home appliances market is fierce, and the falling prices of many televisions have resulted in decreasing profit margins and increasing pressure on companies, Dong added.

Top: Visitors gather at TCL's booth during the Appliance & Electronics World Expo 2023 in Shanghai in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Above: An employee works on a Hisense production line in Cape Town, South Africa, in June 2022. LYU TIANRAN / XINHUA

"Expansion into overseas markets not only relieves the pressure of high inventory in the domestic market, but also increases the international influence of Chinese home appliance companies," Dong said.

Chen Hui, general manager of AVC Revo, a unit of AVC, highlighted the growing importance of China's manufacturing industry on the global stage in light of its huge consumer market and complete industrial chains.

Chinese household appliance companies have increased their manufacturing capacities overseas and improved their global layout to mitigate the negative impacts of tariff barriers and reduce costs since the start of trade frictions between China and the US, Chen said.

Chinese home appliance maker Hisense Group has accelerated steps to expand its business-to-business segment in overseas markets and build brands in its portfolio. That shows its determination to drive the transformation and upgrading of intelligent manufacturing, which will become an important direction of strategic development for the company, industry experts said.

Revenue from overseas markets will make up more than half of the company's total within three years, said Jia Shaoqian, chairman and president of Hisense, in an earlier interview. The company's revenue stood at 183.5 billion yuan in 2022, up 8.8 percent year-on-year. Its overseas revenue was 75.74 billion yuan, accounting for 41.3 percent of the group's total revenue.

Jia said the company has set up 23 R&D centers and 31 industrial parks and production centers across the globe. It also has 66 overseas branches in Europe, the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Australia and Southeast Asia.

Hisense has expanded the production capacity of its Mexican factory, given the complex trade environment, with about 8.5 million televisions made each year.

It purchased Sharp's TV business in Mexico and acquired Sharp America's TV line for the North and South American markets in 2015. The company acquired a 95 percent stake in Japan's Toshiba Visual Solutions Corp in 2017, as part of its efforts to expand globally. In August 2018, it completed the acquisition of Slovenian appliances producer Gorenje.

The company has also announced expansion plans for the Indian market, which will include setting up a local manufacturing plant and expanding its product portfolio.

"To meet the growing demand for our range of televisions, we are ramping up our local manufacturing capabilities and will set up a TV manufacturing plant with a 2-million-unit capacity within the next two years," said Rishi Tandon, chief operating officer of Hisense India.

Hisense ranked second in global television shipments in 2022, an increase of 16.1 percent year-on-year, according to market research company Omdia. The company has boosted its brand awareness in recent years via sponsorship of major world-class sporting events, including prominent soccer tournaments such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and UEFA Euro 2020.

As part of a major trend, appliance makers are stepping up their operations in the global market to improve competitiveness and foster a new growth engine for their long-term development, said Jie Meijuan, general manager of the consumer electronics big data department of AVC.

Jie said globalization is both an opportunity and a challenge for Chinese home appliance manufacturers, and it will promote the sector's high-quality transformation and upgrading.

"Building a sound global industrial chain and enhancing operational capacity in the overseas market will help Chinese home appliance companies utilize global resources, reduce costs and improve management efficiency," Jie said.

Establishing global R&D centers will also help Chinese enterprises gain innovation advantages, master new technologies and obtain a greater voice in increasingly fierce international competition, she added.

Last month, Chinese home appliance maker Midea Group held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new plant in Brazil as part of the company's latest move to expand its footprint in the country.

The new factory will enhance Midea's competitiveness in the local market, the company said, adding it has great confidence in the Brazilian market and will further increase its investment there.

With a total investment of more than 700 million yuan, the new factory is expected to open in July 2024. It covers over 70,000 square meters, with an annual production capacity of 1.3 million units.

"In the past, most Chinese enterprises adopted the OEM model, but nowadays they tend to build their own brands to participate in global competition," said Liang Zhenpeng, an independent consumer electronics analyst. In the original equipment manufacturer model, companies often make a product to be sold by another company that uses its own brand name on the product.

Liang said growth rates in the domestic home appliance market are dropping, so major players should accelerate steps to expand in overseas markets such as Southeast Asia, South America, Africa and other emerging markets as they continue to show huge growth potential in low-, medium- and high-end products.

Zhang Qizi, deputy director of the Institute of Industrial Economics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said Chinese enterprises should work to achieve breakthroughs in key technologies through their own innovation and promote the integration of new-generation information technologies and intelligent manufacturing with industrial supply chains.

Demand grows for gadgets from China

By FAN FEIFEI

An increasing number of domestic small appliances, such as coffee makers, air fryers and robotic vacuum cleaners, are gaining popularity among overseas consumers, industry experts said.

The products' creative designs, simple-to-use features and online promotional events have helped manufacturers boost their sales abroad, they said.

Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd, a maker of such small appliances, has seen robust growth in sales in Southeast Asia, Japan, South Korea, Europe and the United States, with meat grinders, egg beaters and humidifiers seeing the best performance since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The company, founded in 2006, has developed and produced a series of creative electrical appliances, including yogurt makers, egg boilers and electric stewpots and steamers to entice young consumers.

Such sales account for a relatively small proportion of the company's overall revenue at present, said Li Yifeng, chairman and general manager of Bear Electric. However, Li said, "We will expand our presence in overseas markets this year, with a key focus on bolstering sales via cross-border e-commerce platforms."

The pandemic has already changed the buying habits and lifestyles of people, who are increasingly focusing on the quality of life, personal health and food safety, according to the company.

In addition, the rising demand for high-quality consumer goods will continue to be consolidated, with small household appliances becoming popular among tech-savvy consumers, it added.

Chinese-made intelligent home appliances are often popular with foreign buyers, as seen in an explosive growth in sales. On the first day of the Black Friday shopping event last year, sales of robotic vacuum cleaners from Dreame, a Chinese home appliance maker, ranked first on Amazon's online marketplace in Germany.

According to AliExpress, Alibaba Group's business-to-customer platform, coffee grinders and tampers made in China were favored by consumers from South Korea and Spain during last year's Singles' Day shopping event, while those in Saudi Arabia bought coffee makers made by Chinese enterprises.

AliExpress said sales of air fryers rose by 162 percent year-on-year in Spain, while Chinese manufacturers of heating appliances, including electric blankets, saw impressive growth in exports to Europe in 2022, as the continent faced an energy crisis as natural gas prices soared.

An employee from Bear Electric Appliance Co Ltd sells products through livestreaming in Fuyang, Anhui province, in November 2020. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Guangdong Xinbao Electrical Appliances Holdings Co Ltd said more than 70 percent of its revenue is from overseas consumers from more than 100 countries and regions across the globe, including Europe and the US. The company specializes in designing and manufacturing small home appliances such as electric kettles, blenders, toasters and coffee makers.

The rise in overseas orders of such appliances has reflected the robust recovery of China's economy, and the country's home appliance sector is picking up momentum, industry experts said.

China is the world's largest producer of home appliances, with the most complete industrial chains, including upstream materials and components to downstream machine manufacturing, said Liang Zhenpeng, an independent consumer electronics analyst. Liang said he is bullish on the prospects of the Chinese home appliance industry.

Because people have placed greater emphasis on health and quality of life, products with sterilization and disinfection functions are seeing a significant increase in sales, according to Si Zhenming, brand director of Joyoung, a Chinese home appliance manufacturer and soybean milk machine maker.

Cui Lili, director of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics' Institute of E-commerce, said the popularity overseas of small household products made in China shows such cost-effective commodities have gained wide recognition and raised brands' reputation abroad.

"China's major online shopping festivals have become more international, exerting greater influence on overseas shoppers who are increasingly drawn to buying Chinese brands via cross-border e-commerce," Cui said.

Cui said Chinese manufacturers should take advantage of cross-border e-commerce platforms to benefit from heavy demand in overseas markets, learn more about local laws, regulations and quality standards and adjust supply chains to make products that meet local needs.

Generally speaking, consumers overseas have gradually boosted their awareness of and trust in Chinese companies and products, and maintain a favorable attitude toward Chinese brands, according to a white paper released by online media outlets Sina News and Huanqiu.com.

Liu Buchen, an independent researcher in the sector, said some Chinese manufacturers should abandon the low-quality and low-price competition strategy as soon as possible, and instead innovate in technology, quality and design.

Veteran vocalist Gong Linna (right) and Japanese singer Maria, also known as Mai Mizuhashi, sing the song *Hua Hai* (Sea of Flowers) in the music and reality show *Riding the Wind 2023.*

United in harmony

Singers from various backgrounds at home and abroad tune into one another during hit reality show, **Xing Wen** reports.

In the rich tapestry of global music, certain genres possess a unique allure that transcends cultural boundaries. One such captivating vocal style is Shima Uta, originating from the enchanting islands of Okinawa, Japan. Also known as "island songs" in English, the singing style demands rapid transitions between chest voice and falsetto, creating a haunting and ethereal atmosphere.

Inspired by this special vocal style, the multitalented pop icon, Jay Chou, created the poignant ballad *Hua Hai* (Sea of Flowers) in 2008, into which he skillfully infused the soothing power of Shima Uta, bringing solace to the hearts of listeners.

Two years later, Kousuke Atari, a renowned Japanese singer who has been at the forefront of popularizing Shima Uta, covered the song, presenting a Japanese version.

The narrative of Chinese and Japanese musical exchange has continued to unfold as the acclaimed Chinese vocalist Gong Linna and Japanese singer Maria, also known as Mai Mizuhashi, presented their own interpretation of the song on the stage of the reality show, *Riding the Wind 2023.*

In their performance, Maria mesmerizes the audience with her resonant contralto voice, which carries depth and richness, enveloping the listeners in complex emotions. Meanwhile, Gong showcases her versatility as a veteran vocalist, seamlessly moving between pop and ethnic minority-style vocal techniques such as vocal chanting, Shima Uta and other genres.

During the song's instrumental interludes, Maria takes center stage, her dance moves synchronizing with the cascading petals falling around her, a visual spectacle that amplifies the poetic expression of the song. Alongside her, Gong's enchanting vocalizations intertwine, adding an otherworldly dimension to the performance.

As the song progresses into its latter half, the two singers swap languages and sing in each other's native tongues during the chorus, heightening its emotional climax.

The performance, featuring the singers' outstanding vocal prowess, a perfectly tailored stage design and the harmonious interplay of two languages, has sparked enthusiastic discussions on social media platforms. Many viewers describe it as "an audiovisual feast" that will linger in their minds for a long time.

"I've employed tones that align with Eastern aesthetics when singing the song. I want to stage performances imbued with Chinese styles in the show," Gong says.

Riding the Wind 2023 is the fourth season of a reality show that aims to showcase the charms of 30-to-50-something women. The series' 2020 debut caused a sensation, capturing widespread public attention by challenging the entrenched focus on youthful beauty within the Chinese entertainment industry.

Embarking upon its latest season this year, the program seeks to expand cross-cultural collaboration and mutual support among women, regardless of their different languages, ages or personality traits.

To achieve this, the show has invited female celebrities from diverse cultural backgrounds to participate in duets or group performances throughout the rounds of competition.

Among them are Chinese TV anchor Xie Na, 42, model-turned-actress Qu Ying, 52, Hong Kong actress Ada Choi Siu-fun, 50, and Taiwan singer Ella Chen Chia-hwa, 42, as well as international participants such as South Korean actress Choo Ja-hyun, 44, Russian chanteuse Kateryna Kelly, 33, and American singer Annie Lowdermilk, 33.

Gong, along with her German husband, songwriter Robert Zollitsch, has long been exploring the realm of "new Chinese art music", which aims to preserve the essence of traditional Chinese folk music in new forms.

According to Gong, collaborating with international artists on the show has the potential to broaden her creative horizons for producing "new Chinese art music" in the future.

"Such collaborations may also facilitate the exposure of my musical works to larger audiences," she says.

Widening career pathways

The participation of Vietnamese pop idol Chi Pu, 30, has attracted a significant number of Vietnamese viewers to the show.

Chi has long worked as a model, singer-dancer and actress and enjoys a strong fan base in her country. Currently, she is making a name for herself in the broader Asian entertainment industry.

She considers joining the show to be an opportunity to learn from other participants and the production unit.

"There are sisters on the show who are talented in singing, dancing and acting," she says. "I also got to know how the staff produce the show, how they arrange everything and how they take care of each participant. This is something I can learn from them and take back to Vietnam to improve my work."

Chinese pop songs are popular in Vietnam, where many artists perform covers that are greatly enjoyed by local audiences. Being exposed to Chinese songs from a young age, Chi has developed an appreciation for their deep and meaningful lyrics.

As she grew up, she found that Chinese songs, which usually depict everyday life and evoke genuine emotions, could easily resonate with her. She believes that there are similarities between Chinese and Vietnamese pop songs.

"Learning from other countries' cultures and music styles is necessary, as the new generations tend to listen to music from around the globe," Chi says.

Top, from left: Vietnamese pop idol Chi Pu, and Chinese performers — actress Wu Qian, singer Ella Chen Chia-hwa from Taiwan and actress Zhang Jiani — practice together for the performance of the hit Vietnamese song, *See Tinh.* **Above:** Gong and Maria establish a warm friendship in the show. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "I could sense the anxiety of some foreign participants like Maria. However, within the nurturing ambience of sisterhood and the ethos of mutual support that permeated the program, there are always sisters who come to extend a helping hand."
>
> **Gong Linna,** Chinese vocalist

During the show, Chi performed a hit Vietnamese song called *See Tinh* alongside three other participants.

"I'd like to sing more Vietnamese songs in China to pique people's curiosity about Vietnamese music," she says.

She has recently signed up for an online Chinese language course, preparing for possible future engagements in China.

Participating in this program may serve as a pivotal moment for Japanese singer Maria, propelling her into the mainstream music market. She used to be active in the animation, comics and games industry, where she often performed theme songs for genre titles.

Seven years ago, a single by her three-member girl group Garnidelia, called *Paradise Pure Land,* went viral on Bilibili, a prominent gathering place for anime and manga enthusiasts in China, resulting in numerous covers and dance renditions. That marked a significant turning point in her music career.

"From that time onward, my life took a completely different trajectory, opening up many opportunities for me to perform overseas," she says. "Without the success of the song, I might not have had the chance to participate in *Riding the Wind 2023.*"

Expressing her gratitude toward the Chinese fans who have shown love and support for her, Maria released a song called *Togen Renka* in 2017. This special track, for which she wrote the lyrics, was dedicated to her Chinese fan base.

With its Chinese-style arrangement, incorporating traditional instruments, and vocals partly in Chinese, Maria aimed to create a heartfelt connection with the audience.

Her adorable stage presence, impressive vocal abilities and dedicated attitude have captured the hearts of many viewers of the reality show. She once even topped the audience popularity vote among all the participants.

"I'm so happy to see that more people know my name and enjoy my music. I hope that more people can come and attend my concerts, sharing the musical journey together with me," she says.

In August and September, Maria will embark on a concert tour in China, including cities such as Hong Kong, Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Chengdu in Sichuan province, Chongqing, Beijing and Shanghai.

Opening hearts

Prior to collaborating with Gong on the performance of *Hua Hai,* Maria found herself in a stressful situation of self-doubt due to her Chinese language level. Learning Chinese songs within a short time frame was a major challenge.

"At that point, Gong stepped in with unwavering patience, meticulously teaching me Chinese, word by word, and explained the meaning of the lyrics for me," recalls Maria.

Gong says: "I could sense the anxiety of some foreign participants like Maria. However, within the nurturing ambience of sisterhood and the ethos of mutual support that permeated the program, there are always sisters who come to extend a helping hand to their foreign counterparts, enabling them to integrate into the collective and overcome language barriers."

For established singer Gong, participating in music shows is nothing new. However, her previous experiences mostly revolved around solo performances. This time, in a collaborative setting, she has had to embrace the role of harmonizer.

"I need to learn to put aside my individuality and prioritize the cohesion within the team," she remarks.

Gong believes that the portrayal of mutual appreciation and support among women in the program, coupled with their unwavering determination to overcome hurdles and deliver wonderful performances, will inspire viewers.

"This will empower them to confront all the challenges life throws at them with courage and resilience," she says.

Gong herself has also undergone unexpected transformations within this supportive environment.

In one episode of the show, when Maria, struggling with confidence in her own performance, quietly began to shed tears, Gong mustered the courage to open up about her lifelong inner trauma — a deep-seated belief that she was not beautiful.

"I always despised the color pink, as I associated it with being a pretty girl. My color is red, a symbol of power," she confided to Maria.

In the process of baring their scars to one another despite the language barrier, these women found solace and healing.

Through tears, fragmented English, and body language, they comforted each other and gained confidence and strength together.

Regarding the touching moment, Gong explains that: "Seeing the other participants, all of them beautiful and with great figures, I couldn't help but feel inadequate about my own looks. Maria, in particular, with her sweet appearance and impressive singing and dancing skills, seemed like a perfect fit for the show. However, to my surprise, even she experienced moments of self-doubt. It was in that very moment that I mustered the bravery to confront my own insecurities about my physical appearance."

After forging this behind-the-scenes bond, the two female singers, one aged 48 and the other 31, hailing from different countries and showcasing distinct styles, took the stage for their duet in resplendent pink attire.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

From left: A group of Chinese participants of the show, *Riding the Wind 2023* — Taiwan actress Ivy Chen, Hong Kong singer-actress Celina Jade, singer Sun Yue, singer-actress Wang Xiaomin and model-turned-actress Qu Ying — perform together.

LIFESHANGHAI

Chinese version of *The Price* set to make a grand debut

Play marks second time He Bing will play both director and main actor, **Zhang Kun** reports.

Directed by renowned theater actor He Bing, the Shanghai leg of *The Price* will take place from June 20 to 23 at the Shanghai Grand Theatre. The production is the first Chinese version of the renowned play of the same name by Arthur Miller (1915-2005), according to He.

Miller first visited China in 1983 upon the invitation of the Beijing People's Art Theatre and directed the first Chinese production of his masterpiece, *Death of a Salesman*. The play has since been one of the most frequently presented Western theater works in China.

The Chinese production of *The Price* premiered at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing in January before going on a national tour.

A theater actor from the Beijing People's Art Theatre, He last performed at the Shanghai Grand Theatre in 2014, when he played the leading role in the Chinese adaptation of Japanese playwright Koki Mitani's play *University of Laughs*.

The production was a huge success, with the tickets to all eight shows sold out, recalled Zhang Xiaoding, general manager of the Shanghai Grand Theatre, who described the event as "an unprecedented phenomenon at our theater for a Chinese theater production".

He, 55, arrived in Shanghai on May 23 to participate in a public discussion about the upcoming showings of *The Price* with Li Jianming, a translator and literary critic.

"Chinese audiences are familiar with Arthur Miller and his plays, such as *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*, but *The Price* had never been presented in public on the Chinese mainland," says He, when asked about the motivation behind the creation of the Chinese version of the renowned play.

"I am not so bold as to judge Arthur Miller, but I think his plays are powerful enough to reach beyond time and space," says He, who read *The Price* last year and believes the theme of guilt and responsibility, as well as the topic of strained relationships between family members, will have strong resonance with today's Chinese audiences.

"It is a dilemma faced by all human beings — do we live for ourselves, or do we live for other people? It's like an alternative version of 'to be or not to be'," he adds.

Written in 1967, *The Price* tells a story about two brothers reuniting, decades after taking separate paths in life, to sell their late father's estate.

In the Chinese production, the big brother, Walter Franz, played by He, is a successful doctor who chooses to live for nobody but himself, while the younger brother, Victor, who is played by Zhou Shuai, lives a humble life with his wife Esther.

"The play starts with a discussion about the estimated price of the old furniture, but as it goes on, the play talks about all the problems one can possibly encounter in his or her lifetime," says He.

Top and above: Scenes from *The Price*, which will be staged at the Shanghai Grand Theatre from June 20 to 23, featuring He Bing (top left) and Zhou Shuai (top right, right). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "I am not so bold as to judge Arthur Miller, but I think his plays are powerful enough to reach beyond time and space."
>
> **He Bing,** actor and director

If you go

The Price
7:15 pm, June 20-23
Shanghai Grand Theatre, 300 Renmin Avenue, Huangpu district, Shanghai
021-6386-8686

"The two brothers realize that there is no perfect choice in life and everybody has to pay the price of their own decisions. We have quite a lot of men like Walter now in China — people who have achieved considerable success in terms of money and fame in this rapidly developing economy, but are they really as fulfilled as they claim to be? What is the dark hole in his heart that draws Walter back to the old house?"

Li points out that while audiences tend to sympathize with Victor, who is the underdog, people should refrain from making moral judgments, and find the "resilience and strength of these broken characters".

"Life is cruel, but at the same time it can also empower people," she says.

The Price is the second production in which He takes on the roles of both director and main actor, with the first being the Chinese production of *Le Pere* by French author Florian Zeller in 2018.

The original 1968 production of *The Price* won several theater prizes and has been adapted several times for TV. The latest English production is directed by Conleth Hill and is being shown at the Gate Theatre in Dublin, Ireland.

Contact the writer at zhangkun@chinadaily.com.cn

Film festival launches ticket sales as venue gets star treatment

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

Online ticket sales for films to be showcased at the 25th edition of the Shanghai International Film Festival begins at noon on Friday.

Hosted by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, the China Media Group and the Shanghai municipal government, this year's SIFF will take place from Thursday to June 16 and showcase more than 400 films in 41 cinemas around the city.

This year, the SIFF, which is one of the 14 competitive feature film festivals in the world accredited by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations, received a total of 8,800 film submissions from 128 countries and regions. These will compete for the Golden Goblet Awards in five categories: the main competition, Asian new talent, documentary films, animation films and short films.

About half of the films were submitted between December 2021 and March 2022, and chose to stay on the competition list for a year after the 25th edition of the SIFF was postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The festival announced the 12 feature films shortlisted for the main competition on Monday. Three of them are Chinese films: *All Ears* directed by Liu Jiayin, *Dust to Dust* by Jonathan Li, and *Good Autumn, Mommy* by Chen Shizhong.

The most anticipated of the three Chinese films is arguably *All Ears*, which stars veteran actors Hu Ge and Qi Xi, as well as rising star Wu Lei. The film tells the story of the life of an unsuccessful playwright who finds a new job writing obituaries. As he meets people from all walks of life and tries to console them while doing his job, the protagonist ends up finding the meaning of his own life.

This year's SIFF jury panel will consist of 21 members from 12 countries and regions, 11 of whom are from China. The jury members will not only work as judges for the five-category Golden Goblet Awards, but also showcase their own creations at the festival and hold panel discussions at the Golden Goblet forum to share their filmmaking experience.

One of the 41 cinemas participating in the SIFF this year is the Shanghai Film Art Center, which recently celebrated its reopening after about 15 months of renovations.

Built in 1991, the center has been the main venue for SIFF since its establishment in 1993. The 1,008-seater main auditorium, where many international blockbusters have made their China premieres, now has a Dolby laser projection system and immersive audio system, making it one of the first Dolby auditorium with more than 1,000 seats in Asia.

A 29-meter-long and 6-meter-wide canopy LED screen has also been installed in the lobby of the center to showcase trailers for new movies.

The renovation involved opening new passages between the film center and neighboring buildings. The outdoor stairs have also been removed to create more public space in front of the center.

"We want to break down the boundary between the center and the community and welcome more people to come and enjoy the art of movies," Wang Jian'er, president of the Shanghai Film Group, told local media.

"I believe the attraction of film art, together with the tree-lined street view and historical buildings along Xinhua Road, will make this center a popular leisure hub for film lovers and other people," he added.

Top: *All Ears*, a film shortlisted for the main competition section at the 25th edition of the Shanghai International Film Festival.
Above left: *Dolphin Boy*, a film in the animation section.
Above Right: *Leap of Faith*, a film in the documentary section.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Glassblowing prodigy shines in the spotlight

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

Young glassblower Zhao Jinya is the first Chinese artist to be featured at the Liuli China Museum in Shanghai. Her solo exhibition *Nebulosity Walk in Thy Memory* is showcasing more than 30 works from May 18 to Sept 3.

Born in 1994, Zhao is a doctoral candidate at the Royal College of Art, London, who has had many of her works collected by museums and galleries at home and abroad, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in the United Kingdom, the Prague Gallery of Czech Glass, the Qingdao Art Museum in Shandong province and Southern Illinois University in the United States.

At the opening of the exhibition, Zhao described the event as a summary of her experiences over the past decade.

Zhao Jinya pictured with her glass creations at the artist's solo exhibition at the Liuli China Museum in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The curator of the show, Feng Zhenting, said he arranged the exhibits according to when they were created, to reflect the artist's evolution and development starting in 2018. Zhao started her career in the glass studios of Zibo, Shandong province, before moving to Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, and then onto the UK.

"When viewing Zhao's glass sculptures, one may experience a sense of strangeness as the pieces present themselves in an unexpected manner, with hazy layers of colors and curvy shapes that soften the edges of the glass, a material that is typically sharp and cold," said Feng.

The exhibition also showcases some of the artist's latest experiments with watercolor and wall pieces, as well as her sketches and documentation of her creative process.

If you go

Nebulosity Walk in Thy Memory: Zhao Jinya's Glass Art Exhibition
10 am-6 pm, May 18-Sept 3
Liuli China Museum, 25 Taikang Road, Huangpu district, Shanghai
021-6467-2268

"Since 1987, when the founders of the Liuli China Museum, Loretta Yang and Chang Yi, started to work with pate-de-verre (paste of glass) for glass art and revived the ancient Chinese glassmaking craft, we have constantly paid close attention to different methods, styles and creations of glass art in the world," Jenny Tsai, assistant director of Liuli China Museum, told China Daily.

"Emerging glass artists in China in recent years are showing dexterity with the material and have developed individualistic styles of their own. Their achievements have now been recognized by the global art scene."

Tsai noted that Zhao has a unique approach to glassblowing and has over the years not only delved into the material itself, but also constantly pushed the boundaries of techniques and experimented with the aesthetic expression of this particular medium.

"We hope the exhibition of her work will attract new audiences and initiate new dialogues between the contemporary and ancient Chinese glass art, which is featured at our museum," she said.

LIFE

Left: Domestic worker Tan Qirong (front), two audience members and four other domestic workers perform the dance *Fen Shen* during a livestreamed event. **Right:** Domestic worker Niu Huiling (right) hugs fellow worker Tan. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Moving performance highlights art therapy

Livestream shines spotlight on domestic workers and the organization helping them battle life's emotional burdens through artistic means, **Xu Fan** reports.

Bathed in the soft, warm stage lights, two dancers dressed in all-white outfits gaze at each other with deep emotion in their eyes. Slowly, they move toward one another and embrace tightly, as if they were long-lost family members reuniting after many years apart.

The scene is both touching and infectious, but what makes it even more remarkable is that the two performers are not professionals, but rather amateurs who work as domestic workers in Beijing.

At a livestreamed event organized by Tencent News and Tencent Public Welfare on May 20, the two dancers joined a group of guests, mostly ordinary people who use art to find relief from the burdens of life and reignite their sense of hope, sharing how they shake off loneliness and stress in the metropolis while working as nannies.

Other guests included an 82-year-old woman who helps her husband fight the creeping symptoms of Alzheimer's disease with dance, and a young woman with cerebral palsy who launched a nonprofit organization to help other women in her position.

From left: Shao Wenting, hostess of Tencent News, domestic workers Tan Qirong and Niu Huiling, Yan Weixu, a representative of Beijing Hongyan Social Work Service Center, and director Liao Shuyi, at the event. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The event attracted thousands of online viewers, with some of them commenting that the most impressive part was the performance by the amateur dancers and their stories.

The dance, titled *Fen Shen* (Multiple Roles), has brought together almost 100 female domestic workers from the Beijing Hongyan Social Work Service Center, a public welfare institution that aims to assist domestic workers to enhance their cultural and job-related skills. The participants dedicated their only day off each week, over the course of 36 weeks, to rehearse for the performance.

Niu Huiling, one of the two dancers, is a former rural schoolteacher from Linfen in Central China's Shanxi province. After working in education for 27 years, she had to leave her hometown and seek better-paying work in Beijing due to financial stresses caused by her husband's illness.

"My son had just got married, and we had built a new house in the village. But then my husband fell ill, and we incurred a large amount of debt. My daughter bought me a train ticket to Beijing, so for the first time in my life, I embarked on a new journey alone," she recalls.

It was winter in 2019, about two months before millions of Chinese returned to their hometowns to celebrate Spring Festival, which is the most important family reunion of the year.

However, Niu did not have any excitement for celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year. Instead, she dragged her tired body from one recruitment agency to another, with the aim of landing a job as a domestic worker as soon as possible, so that she could accumulate the necessary 10,000 yuan ($1,410) within two months.

On the eve of Spring Festival, Niu achieved her goal of earning the targeted income. The success encouraged her to return to Beijing one year later as she still faced financial problems. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were fewer opportunities for domestic work, so she had to take an unstable job selling food packed in paper boxes to labor workers on a construction site.

"I had been working for three to four months when I received a call from home informing me that my husband's condition had deteriorated. When I returned home, he had already been sent to the intensive care unit. We spent the last 100 days of his life in the hospital," recalls Niu.

Despite enduring immense grief, economic pressure compelled her to return to Beijing for work after the funeral. Over the following months, struggling with a sense of helplessness, she coped by jogging and drinking — until she joined the Hongyan center and found comfort in dancing *Fen Shen*.

For Tan Qirong, the other dancer and domestic worker joining the Tencent event, the dance also served as a hub to ease her emotional pain. Previously working at a factory in Langfang, Hebei province, Tan, a native from Mianyang in Sichuan province, switched careers from being a delivery person to a domestic worker in the Chinese capital in 2019.

"I was working in Beijing when my father passed away, but my family didn't inform me until six months later. It was a painful experience that I kept buried deep inside. However, during the rehearsal of the dance, I finally felt like I could release my emotions and find peace," says Tan.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Commerce, as of 2021, China had an estimated 37.6 million domestic workers, with most of them being rural females in cities engaged in babysitting or taking care of the elderly, as reported by Southern Weekly, a Guangzhou-based newspaper.

Yan Weixu, the producer of the performance, believes that domestic workers are "invisible residents" of cities, and she hopes that art can help them boost their confidence and enable them to voice their needs and requirements.

Contact the writer at xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

Forum offers a taste of tea industry's potential

By CHENG YUEZHU
chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn

Tea industry and culture experts stressed at a recent forum in Beijing that coordinated efforts to promote tea culture, the development of the tea industry and the use of technology in the sector are required.

Traditional tea processing techniques and associated social practices in China were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at the end of last year.

The inscription encompasses a total of 44 national-level intangible cultural heritage projects from 15 provinces, autonomous regions, or municipalities. Among them, Fujian province contributes six elements, including Wuyi Mountain rock tea.

Left: Performers present a dance with a theme based on tea picking at the forum's opening ceremony. **Right:** Guests and delegates learn about, and taste, various types of tea during the forum. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

According to Ye Yuangao, deputy head of Wuyishan Tea Science Society, this type of tea was one of the earliest varieties to be introduced to the European and American markets during the 17th century.

Along with tea making, rich cultural practices emerged, such as rituals performed on mountains during springtime in the hope of encouraging a bountiful harvest, or *chabaixi*, whisking powdered tea and creating images on the foam that forms on top.

"We should continuously strengthen the protection, inheritance and development of intangible cultural heritage related to tea, establish a comprehensive protection system, and construct tea culture exhibition halls, heritage sites and training centers," Ye says.

He also suggests it is important to organize performances that center on tea culture, host cultural tourism festivals and expos, and arrange activities that engage tourists in experiencing tea production techniques and exchanging with tea makers and sommeliers.

The forum emphasized that the tea industry encompasses not only tea cultivation and processing, but also a diverse range of tea-related products, including food items that incorporate tea leaves as an ingredient and teas that promote good health.

The latter was highlighted by Tian Xueyuan, a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, in his speech, saying that he drinks a type of fermented tea daily to maintain well-being.

In order to promote the development of the tea industry, Tian proposes that tea enterprises should uphold tradition while seeking innovation in order to ensure high-quality growth.

"The tea industry is currently facing several issues that are hindering its development. These include a limited range of tea products, a lack of diversity in processing methods, intense competition among similar products, and low added value," Tian says.

"In line with China's high-quality development strategy, the tea industry needs to not only expand production capacity, but also improve efficiency, as well as pursue transformation and upgrading."

During the event, a short film series titled *Tea Road* was announced. The title refers to an important trade route connecting China with other Eurasian countries, which emerged after the ancient Silk Road.

Set during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the series will depict how merchants from Shanxi and Fujian provinces took tea abroad, fueling the prosperity of the tea trade and China's cross-border commercial exchanges.

Designer taps into bicultural upbringing

SYDNEY — While big brands often commandeer the spotlight at a fashion week, up-and-coming new faces can also turn heads as they hold the potential to wow the industry with their creativity.

Awarded as one of the four Next Gen designers by Australian Fashion Week, Xizhu Wu finished her debut runway show in a refurbished gallery at the Carriageworks in Sydney, beaming with joy and relief.

"It's my first proper runway show, which I'm very excited about, but I'm feeling a lot more relieved now that the show's over. Now I can relax a little, move on and focus on the next thing," Wu says.

For the young Chinese Australian who founded her own label Xi Wu Studio, it took about five months to create a brand-new collection, from sketches to ready-for-runway pieces, with "nostalgia" as the core concept.

By reworking her previous designs in new fabrics, including crinkle wool, flannel wool, silk and floral knit, Wu fused pattern-making and garment construction techniques originating from the East and the West. Her well-tailored attire impressed fashionistas with its unexpected detailing.

"I wanted to start again with some older pieces so that everyone can see what I've done in the past, what I'm doing now, and what direction I might take in the future," the designer says.

"It's also about my bicultural upbringing," says Wu. "I put everything into the collection to reflect my emotions and how I perceived my upbringing."

Wu grew up in South China's Guangdong province until the age of 5 and then moved to Australia with her parents. Both Eastern and Western culture have left their stamp on the aesthetic of the designer's work, which was mirrored in the garments on the runway.

"For example, in Eastern culture, the garments are flatter with more coverage. There is room for movement and there are a lot of layers, whereas in Western culture, it's more tailored and fitted to your body," Wu says, noting that she tried to keep a balance between the two styles.

In her collection, an asymmetrical blazer bonded with a reflective knit was perfectly matched with a pair of loose-fitting, twisted pleat trousers. A green cropped jacket and miniskirt combo featured a Chinese floral pattern, with a jade charm dangling at the model's waist as she strutted down the catwalk.

The innovative designer also stitched frog buttons on a layered blazer, made laser-cut acrylic accouterments using the Chinese character *fu* as a motif, and reinvented traditional cotton textiles for a more contemporary look.

"When I was researching Chinese traditional garments from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, I saw elements such as flat, baggy layering, slits and ties. These are the elements that I have incorporated into my designs," Wu says.

From quilted clothes worn by people in China, the peony painting hung up on the wall at her grandmother's house, to the decor in tea houses where she had dim sum with her family, all things Wu saw growing up became a source of inspiration. Wu says that as she grew older, she developed a deeper understanding of Chinese culture. What Wu once regarded as "old-fashioned" now looked "actually quite cool" to her. "And I can apply my own style," she says.

Meanwhile, Wu appreciates her experience of living in Australia. It was on a textile course in high school that Wu got her first glimpse of the fashion industry. With encouragement from her teachers, who she invited to her show, Wu decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in design at the University of Technology Sydney.

After reaching a major milestone at the 2023 Australian Fashion Week, Wu is thinking about extending the collection, having a few pieces available for preorder and creating custom garments.

The 25-year-old designer follows a one-step-at-a-time approach to her burgeoning career, saying that she may hold her first solo show next year.

XINHUA

SPORTS

BASEBALL

Umpires Janet Moreno, Yalili Acosta and Miroslava Cumba get ready to officiate at a baseball game at the Latinoamericano Stadium in Havana on May 29. They are members of the country's first all-female umpire crew which was formed earlier this year. REUTERS

Cuba's female crew calling the shots

Country's first all-women umpire team blazing a trail and earning respect in top-tier baseball league

Cuba's first all-female umpire team is winning plaudits by officiating at top-tier baseball games in a sport that is a national obsession on the island and long dominated by men.

Former baseball and softball player Janet Moreno has blazed a solitary trail for 18 seasons as Cuba's first top-league female umpire, but was joined by three others a few months ago.

"Things are starting to change," said Moreno, 49, sporting her black garb ahead of a recent game at Havana's Latinoamericano Stadium. "This is the first time in the Americas that a team of women works the top league of a country."

On the field, Moreno wears dark sunglasses, firm and unflappable as Industriales and Pinar del Rio face off.

"The players have shown her great respect," said Industriales catcher Oscar Valdes.

"What matters is not your gender but who you are on the field and your passion for excellence."

The Cuban four, including Miroslava Cumba, Yalili Acosta and Milagros Quinones, are the only such group in global baseball, according to Cesar Valdes, head of rules and officiating for Cuba's national baseball federation.

"We wanted to be ahead," he said.

Even in Major League Baseball, the world's most watched baseball tournament, there has never been a female umpire.

Camaraderie

Preparing for another game this week, the four women swapped jokes and said such camaraderie has helped their success.

"I stay focused on my work on the field. I blank out what's going on in the stands," said Cumba, 43, who spent eight years previously umpiring youth baseball.

Baseball is not the only sport becoming more inclusive: Cuba late last year staged its first official female boxing matches since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.

Moreno, who dreams of someday umpiring the Olympics or World Baseball Classic, jokes that her newfound fame does not mean she must relinquish her femininity. "When we go out (to umpire) we wear perfume, so that it feels like there is a flower on the field and the flower should not be mistreated," she said.

REUTERS

Miroslava Cumba and Janet Moreno prepare to take to the field for a baseball game at the Latinoamericano Stadium in Havana on May 29. REUTERS

TENNIS

'Iron Man' Novak serves up marvel and mystery in equal measure

PARIS — So what exactly was that metal-looking object about the size of a bottle cap that was taped to Novak Djokovic's chest at the French Open?

He was asked about it. He didn't give a straight answer.

During the changeover between the end of the first set and the start of the second during the 22-time Grand Slam champion's 7-6 (2), 6-0, 6-3 victory over Marton Fucsovics at Roland Garros on Wednesday night, Djokovic removed his orange polo shirt and swapped it for another.

Nothing out of the ordinary there, especially after a set that lasted around one and a half hours.

Here's what was unusual: TV cameras on Court Philippe Chatrier zoomed in on an item that was placed right in the middle of Djokovic's chest. Commentators on Tennis Channel's broadcast joked about it having something to do with the Marvel Comics character Iron Man, portrayed on the big screen by Robert Downey Jr.

Maybe someone told Djokovic about that observation.

Because that was the faux explanation the 36-year-old father of two offered when a reporter wanted him to explain precisely what that thing really was.

Novak Djokovic advanced 7-6 (2), 6-0, 6-3 on Wednesday. AFP

"When I was a kid I liked Iron Man a lot, so I try to impersonate Iron Man," Djokovic said with a smile.

And then he went a step further.

"My team delivers an incredibly efficient nanotechnology to help me deliver my best on the court, so that's the biggest secret of my career," Djokovic said sarcastically. "If it wasn't for that, I probably wouldn't be sitting here."

Hmmmm.

Perhaps a sequel to this saga will come on Friday. That's when Djokovic will continue his pursuit of a third title at the French Open — and what would be a men's-record 23rd major championship overall, breaking a tie with rival Rafael Nadal — when he faces No 29 seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain.

'My man Jokic'

Djokovic might be busy trying to win the French Open but he definitely will be keeping tabs on how his friend and countryman Nikola Jokic fares in the NBA Finals with the Denver Nuggets.

The Nuggets will host Game 1 of the NBA Finals against the Miami Heat on Thursday night (Friday morning, Beijing time). Denver has never previously been to the league's championship round.

"I've got to support my man Joker," Djokovic said on Wednesday night after reaching the third round. "I hope they win their first ring."

Djokovic, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, and Jokic, a two-time NBA MVP, are both from Serbia, a country with a population of about 7 million.

"We are super proud of him," Djokovic said.

"Coming from a small country and small city in our country, very humble beginnings for him, and he still stayed very modest, very humble. Very simple guy. Family guy," Djokovic said.

"He loves his horses ... and I find that very funny, but at the same time, I respect it a lot."

AGENCIES

Zheng rues errors after exit

Zheng Qinwen

Chinese women's No 1 Zheng Qinwen lost to Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva in a grueling second-round match at the French Open on Wednesday.

With the match evenly poised at 2-2 in the deciding set, Putintseva, a two-time quarterfinalist at Roland Garros, won four consecutive games to clinch the victory, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.

A staggering 49 unforced errors, compared to her opponent's 19, scuppered Zheng's hopes of progressing. Last year, she reached the last 16 in her debut at the clay-court major.

"Too many errors today, especially in the first set. I made it too easy for her," admitted Zheng, who arrived in Paris after reaching the quarterfinals of the Italian Open in Rome. That run propelled Zheng to a career-high world ranking of No 19.

"She combined good long shots and drop shots, which had the effect of making the court seem smaller. So I couldn't find enough space to move back to hit the ball," the 20-year-old added.

Zheng broke into the top 100 in January 2022 after a run through qualifying to the second round of the Australian Open. She has participated in six Grand Slam tournaments, reaching at least the second round in each.

Her career took off at last year's French Open. She subsequently broke into the top 30 and advanced to the final in Tokyo. She also secured the WTA Newcomer of the Year award.

"I think my rise up the rankings has far exceeded my expectations. I still think I could do much better. As for today's match, I think I should have won, but I didn't and that hurts a lot," Zheng confessed.

Putintseva will next face Sloane Stephens of the United States, the former US Open winner who eased into the last 32 with a 6-2, 6-1 victory over Russia's world No 56 Anna Blinkova in just an hour and 13 minutes.

Zheng's compatriot Zhang Zhizhen, who made history on Monday by becoming the first Chinese mainland player in the Open era to win a match in the men's singles main draw at Roland Garros, exited the doubles competition at the first round.

The 26-year-old Zhang and Romania's Victor Vlad Cornea lost to Germany's Tim Puetz and Kevin Krawietz, 7-5, 6-4.

XINHUA

SPORTS

SOCCER

Sevilla extends its Europa League empire

Spanish side continues its remarkable recent domination of competition with seventh title

Sevilla midfielder Ivan Rakitic allows fans to touch the Europa League trophy on Wednesday. REUTERS

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Five months after scoring the winning penalty in the World Cup final, Gonzalo Montiel converted the clinching spot-kick for Sevilla in the Europa League final on Wednesday to beat Jose Mourinho's Roma.

It earned Sevilla a seventh title in the competition.

The Argentina international sent Roma goalkeeper Rui Patricio the wrong way with his retaken penalty to seal a 4-1 win in the shootout after the match finished 1-1 after extra time in Budapest, where Mourinho was aiming to maintain his record of having never lost a final in European competitions.

"I've won five finals and I lost this one, but I'm coming back home proud again," Mourinho told Sky Sport Italia. "The boys gave everything."

Gianluca Mancini and Roger Ibanez failed to convert for Roma from the spot against Sevilla goalkeeper Yassine Bounou. Montiel missed his first attempt but had another chance after Patricio was adjudged to have come off his line.

Sevilla has still never lost a final it has contested in the Europa League or its precursor, the UEFA Cup — the team also won the competition in 2006, '07, '14, '15, '16 and '20 — and secured a place in next season's Champions League.

At one stage close to the relegation zone in the Spanish league and already eliminated from the Champions League, it had looked like a season to forget for Sevilla. But clearly it was not over yet.

A new coach, Jose Luis Mendilibar, came in and things turned around quickly.

"I'm happy to be here, to have won for the club, which was having a hard time when we got here," Mendilibar said. "We have done something good that can have repercussions for the good of the club."

Before the final, Mourinho actually had more European title wins than Mendilibar had total games managed in those same competitions. The 62-year-old Mendilibar's career is peaking since joining Sevilla just two months ago.

As Sevilla players celebrated on the field, Mourinho kept his calm and congratulated the Spanish club on the victory.

"We lost a game but not dignity. I've never gone home prouder than today," Mourinho said. "Great match, great final. Intense, vibrant."

After receiving his runner-up medal, Mourinho took it off and gave it to a young fan.

Paulo Dybala had put Roma ahead in the 35th minute at Puskas Arena in the Hungarian capital. Mancini sent a through-ball for Dybala, who netted past Bounou with a low left-foot shot. The Argentina forward had recovered from an ankle injury in time to be declared fit for the final.

It was Dybala's fifth goal of the Europa League, and 17th overall this season.

Sevilla was only slowly getting into the match but Ivan Rakitic came close to equalizing in first-half stoppage time with a low drive from 20 meters out that bounced off the post.

Mendilibar sent on midfielder Suso and forward Erik Lamela, a former Roma player, as substitutes at the start of the second half to rejuvenate his team.

Sevilla equalized through Mancini's own-goal 10 minutes into the second half when he was under pressure from Youssef En-Nesyri. Captain Jesus Navas set up the goal with a cross from the right.

Navas, a 37-year-old veteran, was on the team that won Sevilla's first Europa League title in 2006.

"When they scored against us, you think that it will be very difficult to score against them," Mendilibar said. "The equalizer came quickly in the second half and gave us the strength to continue in the fight to win the game."

Substitute Andrea Belotti failed to beat Bounou in a one-on-one following Lorenzo Pellegrini's freekick seven minutes from time. Suso had a long-distance shot saved by Patricio in the dying seconds.

Sevilla held the upper hand in extra time but didn't create a clear scoring chance, and Roma defender Chris Smalling headed the ball onto the crossbar at the end.

Replacing former Argentina coach Jorge Sampaoli in March, Mendilibar became Sevilla's third coach this season with the team just two points clear of the La Liga relegation zone. His lineup has lost only two of 11 league games since then and is now one point off seventh place going into the final round this weekend.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Mourinho raises doubts over future

Jose Mourinho threw his future as Roma manager into further doubt on Wednesday, saying he was "too tired" after the pain of losing his first major European final to Sevilla.

The Spanish team triumphed 4-1 on penalties after the game in Budapest finished 1-1, with Paulo Dybala's opener canceled out by an own-goal from Roma defender Gianluca Mancini.

The defeat meant Roma failed to qualify for next season's Champions League and prompted questions about whether the 60-year-old would remain in the Italian capital, having been linked with Paris Saint-Germain.

"I have to fight for these lads and therefore not say objectively that I will remain," Mourinho told Sky Sport Italia.

"I spoke to the club in December when I had that approach from the Portuguese national team.

"I have not had any contact with anyone else since then. I have a year left on my contract and this is the situation."

It was Mourinho's first defeat in a European final, but he said he was proud of his team's performance and acknowledged that the season had taken its toll.

"We're physically exhausted, mentally drained, feeling dead because we believe it's an unjust defeat with numerous debatable incidents.

"We are dead tired, but proud. I always say you can lose a football match, but never your dignity or professionalism.

"I lost this one, but I return home prouder than ever this time. The lads gave absolutely everything this season."

Roma is sixth in Serie A with one match remaining.

The Portuguese said he was disappointed with the officiating during the final and felt a number of decisions went against his men.

"We felt pressure against a team that has more talent than us," he said. "We lost a game but not dignity.

"I've never gone home prouder than today, even when I won. We had also worked hard on penalties but we missed two — but all together, not only the penalty takers."

AGENCIES

A view of the Xiamen International Conference & Exhibition Center.

A rendering of the Xiamen International Expo Center. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Display of ambition

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Xiamen, a coastal city in Fujian province, is bolstering the development of its exhibition, convention and meeting industry based on the city's geographic advantages and open economy.

Chen Haoying, deputy head of the Xiamen bureau of commerce and head of the Xiamen bureau of convention & exhibition, said that this year is critical for the comprehensive recovery of the exhibition, convention and meeting industry in China and the nationwide competition will be fierce.

To better seize the opportunities, the Xiamen bureau of commerce recently issued new measures to further promote the development of the city's exhibition, convention and meeting industry.

The measures focus on improving the business environment for the industry and enhancing its professionalism, with the aim of strengthening the city's brand image and boosting its global recognition as a city for exhibitions, conventions and conferences.

"We are focusing on the effectiveness and precision of our policy guidance", in order to raise the quality and efficiency of exhibitions and conventions in the city, boost government-led events and support market-oriented operations, Chen said.

A variety of policies have been initiated. For instance, incentives have been proposed to encourage the growth of brand name exhibitions and subsidies are to be offered to promote the integration of online and offline exhibitions.

Talent training is also to be supported, as are overseas promotion activities.

Chen explained that the aim is to accelerate the high-quality development of the city's exhibition, convention and meeting industry by improving the efficiency of the use of fiscal funds.

Xiamen is also seeking to deepen the integration between the exhibition, convention and meeting industry and other sectors so as to facilitate the transformation and upgrading of advantageous industries in the city.

Projects involving pillar industries or strategic emerging industries can receive a reward of up to 50 percent on the standard subsidy basis.

The city is also improving the subsidy standards for international conferences and influential conferences so they can gather high-end resources, as well as providing subsidies for the creation of internationally leading exhibition platforms.

For example, a subsidy will be given to trade exhibitions with an exhibition area of 6,000 square meters or more and an exhibition period of no less than three days. A one-time bonus of 500,000 yuan ($70,650) will be given to a three-day exhibition with an exhibition area of 150,000 square meters and 7,500 booths.

A subsidy of 600,000 yuan is available for extra-large conferences with more than 5,000 attendees and a subsidy of 800,000 yuan will be granted to those with over 8,000 attendees.

Xiamen is paying great attention to the growth of companies in the industry and aims to cultivate a core group with a large business scale and strong competitiveness in their services.

It is also establishing a comprehensive guarantee and linkage mechanism for exhibitions. It is also taking the lead in establishing a comprehensive evaluation mechanism for major exhibition activities with the participation of all industry departments to ensure the provision of efficient services and enhance the sense of satisfaction of participants and visitors.

Xiamen International Conference Center Hotel.